The JOYFUL YEARS

F. T. WAWN

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THE JOYFUL YEARS

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THE JOYFUL YEARS

A Novel

BY

F. T. WAWN

"The joyful years are those when you are finding yourselves, children."

—SHAUN JAMES

NEW YORK

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TO

MY MOTHER

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PART ONE

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THE WINGS OF YOUTH

"Love is the wings of youth, on which it mounts skywards . . ."
SHAUN JAMES.

I

AT four o'clock on a windy May afternoon of the year 1912 Shaun James and Cynthia Rosemary Bremner were departing from the National Portrait Gallery without regret in search of tea. Shaun was jaunty and shabby, and walked in front; Cynthia, bright-eyed, followed respectfully behind. She was young, she was beautiful, with a pretty look of dignity; also she had the unmistakable air of a girl accustomed to be waited upon, so one of the attendants nudged the other, and pointing to Shaun said, " 'E must be somebody!" to which his more experienced comrade replied, " 'E may." Shaun was depressed, because he had intended to talk to his chum of friendship and how easily it may change into a warmer affection, and the sight of such a number of bad pictures had deprived him of power and eloquence. He was repeating mentally: "I'm forty, and I look it. I get good reviews and bad sales. I had an unhappy childhood, oh lor'—men who've been unhappy as children never become cheerful companions. And she's only twenty-one after all! In spite of the fact that I've taught her to think and to begin to appreciate beauty, it still isn't impossible that she should marry into her own class. You don't want to spoil her happiness, Shaun! She's your own pal, Shaun! She doesn't love you that way, however much you may hope and pretend. . . . Although there may

come a chance at dinner to-night. . . . But she's such a perfect little chum!"

The radiant pal, joyous at having still an hour of holiday to look forward to before the usual appointment at Liberty's with her mother, which although pleasant enough in itself had become heavily monotonous from force of repetition, stood by the side of Mr. James upon the outer step (overtopping him by an inch), turned starry grey eyes to his and said gracefully, "Thank you for a lovely afternoon. Please let me pay for tea this time, Shaun." Several taxi-drivers pulled up at the sight of her: Shaun, noticing them, moved off the step to the pavement and started down the slope towards Trafalgar Square.

He was able to remind himself once more of his age, and of greater reasons for self-restraint, to say aloud, "Yes, thank you, dear," and to invent a fairy-story of old St. Martin's to tell her during tea, all as the last stroke of four chimed from the slender steeple.

. . . . . .

Peter Middleton was to dine with the Bremners that night, and his work, which consisted just then of slipping forms into envelopes, comparing the names upon them as he did so, was suffering greatly in consequence. Peter was distracted. The prospect of dining in Portman Square with strangers filled him with excitement and nervousness; months afterwards he had a painful interview with that high official, Laurence Man, because of mistakes made before the Bremners' dinner. Laurence himself never made mistakes, otherwise he would not have reached at the juvenile age of thirty-nine the exalted position that he occupied. And he had an excuse for them which Peter did not possess, for he was head over ears in love with the daughter of Sir Everard and Lady Bremner; in spite of which he was signing documents with a steady hand, undisturbed by the prospect of seeing Rosemary in a few hours. Lady Bremner was Laurence's ally, so he called the young lady by the name that Lady Bremner pre-

ferred—it was characteristic of him. He was unmoved, moreover, by the thought of the obnoxious scribbler James, who was also to be present. Dangerous individual though the man was, as was to be seen by Rosemary's holding to his friendship against her people's expressed wishes, Laurence could not concern himself greatly about a novelist, poor as a church (or any other kind of) mouse and therefore unlikely to attract a girl in the way of marriage. Besides the fellow was a widower—girls don't care for widowers.

Laurence was furiously jealous when in the presence of his beloved, but in her absence intellect ruled supreme; he was not emotionally imaginative. Four o'clock struck, and he was able to dip his fine-pointed pen into the inkpot with an easy mind, ignorant of the identity of Peter except as a junior clerk in the service of the Great Company, a potential maker of mistakes, and happily unaware that he was to see such an insignificant person at the Bremners'.

By four o'clock Peter had satisfied himself that he remembered meeting a little girl much younger than himself on the solitary occasion when his father had taken him to visit Sir Everard Bremner. The child had had fair hair and was dressed in white with short socks; she was called "Polly," a nice kid, who wanted to play cricket when she grew up. She must be grown up now, as he himself had reached the advanced age of twenty-four. Peter wondered whether he would fall in love with her, and expected that he should, if she were pretty and not too "rough on a man." He might even get to know her well supposing the parents weren't altogether bored with him, which was what he expected must happen, seeing that he had never been to a dinner-party before. It was awfully decent of them to ask him. . . .

How lonely he had been since his father died! Aunt May had pitchforked him into this awful hole to earn his living—well, he supposed she couldn't do better, as his father's pension had died with him. . . . Major Middleton's son, intended for the army . . . And now he was a clerk, the companion of fellows he hated. Why,

look at that animal, Blotter, over there, shirking his work and pretending to be ever so busy—no, he wasn't —Gad, he was putting it away!

With untactful promptitude Peter, who in his dreams had been unaware of the progress of the minute-hand, hurled his envelopes into a drawer, rushed for his hat and coat and fled from the building.

II

Lady Bremner was accustomed to consider her husband before her children, to regard them through his eyes, and to treat them as she thought he would do in her place. Sir Everard was ignorant of this, and Cynthia suffered thereby. Her father's heart belonged to his wife, his intellect was devoted to the affairs of the Colonial Office, which he had served for thirty years. He believed that Cynthia's confidence was given to her mother and that the two women were leading a satisfying feminine life together in the region of teas, shopping, and dances. It pleased him to keep her a child and to behave to her as though she were seventeen instead of being, as she was, at the restless and thoughtful age of twenty-one. And Lady Bremner, imitating him, had lost the girl's confidence already.

The trio appeared to form a devoted and united family, while, as is the case in so many homes to-day, they were moving towards an inevitable clash of temperaments. Cynthia's fate pressed the more hardly upon her because her only brother Alan had always by his father's wish enjoyed the fullest liberty of thought and action; he was now in chambers, independent of Portman Square, with an allowance to supplement the income which he drew as a clerk in the Foreign Office, while Cynthia herself had to ask her mother for change every time she went out, as she had neither pocket-money nor dress allowance from which to pay her cab-fares.

Amongst other preferences, Sir Everard liked to see the hair of his womenfolk smartly arranged, and their clothes what he would have called "neat," in other words expensively simple, which was the reason why Cynthia, who shared a maid with her mother, was

dressed and finished and sitting alone in her room three-quarters of an hour before the time for dinner. He praised that appearance of finish, that almost varnished air of smartness, which a good maid, and only a good maid, can give to the attire of a young girl. This was illogical and conflicted with his general desire to keep his 'Polly' the little child he loved to remember her; still, he like it, and Lady Bremner insisted upon regarding his wish as 'Polly's' law. She would loyally have called the girl by the pet name she disliked, had she not felt that Sir Everard preferred to keep it for his own use, liking to hear his tall and beautiful daughter addressed as 'Rosemary' by his wife and son, while not objecting to the occasional 'Cynthia' that the picturesque Shaun James let drop in public.

"Why do you call him 'picturesque,' Daddy?" asked Cynthia once, rather rebelliously.

"Because he is," replied Daddy. "I do not say he is not also clever!" It had not occurred to the girl hitherto to observe her friend from the point of view of decorativeness.

Now she was considering him again, seated in a room which was coloured white and blue relieved by the palest gold, a nest of flowered chintzes and delicate gold casement hangings; where *Cherries* and *My First Sermon* (early Cynthia), Burne-Jones reproductions and Alpine photographs (middle or school period), and, greatly daring, *Eve* and *A Wounded Amazon* of the present Shaun James era, hung side by side upon the walls. Shaun would have made ruthless eliminations and obtained clearer space for the pictures that remained, but Cynthia had not yet risen to this height of artistic perfection. She added to her favourites and was never unfaithful to an old friend.

A bright fire crackled on the hearth, the electric light was white and searching—also trying to the eyes and complexion, a matter for which Cynthia's youth cared little. She adorned a comfortable chair; and the maid, busied with Lady Bremner, was certain not to return. Cynthia was alone with her thoughts.

Yes, Shaun was really nice-looking, in spite of his irregular features, because he *looked what he was.* One could see he had been a journalist and had given it up to write beautiful prose. His face was very clever, and there was something more than clever about it, something that had developed. He was obviously an artist, but also not a poet. His eyes looked into one, and not upon one, so he could not be a painter or a sculptor, and they were kind eyes. He so clearly 'understood' that it was very sure he couldn't be a musician. . . .

These impressions followed instantaneously upon each other in Cynthia's mind, without clothing themselves in words. They would in all probability have evaded her, had she tried to speak them aloud. She was quick of understanding, but not very fluent in expressing ideas in language, although she talked easily of facts and opinions; and this kept her free from conceit, making her a sympathetic listener to a clever man. Sir Everard had formed high hopes of her as a child, especially in the direction of mathematics, his favourite study, but an illness having interrupted her education at a critical age she had lost ground which had never been picked up. The greater part of her intellectual development she owed to Shaun.

Being a girl of striking good looks, who had already received a number of proposals, much to her distress and embarrassment, Cynthia of course was conscious that Shaun was beginning to be in love with her. Laurence Man she did not like and dismissed him therefore from her thoughts. Peter she remembered only as a shy little boy who had failed to respond when a shy little girl tried to make friends with him. His sad, elderly, shabby father was dead now, and Daddy had cried out at the breakfast table, "My God! Emmeline, poor Middleton's gone at last," when he read the announcement in *The Morning Post.* That was years ago, but she still had the clearest recollection of her mother's face of horror, which was not for Major Middleton. She wondered, with some bitterness, why Daddy had not looked up his old friend's son before; being accustomed

to set friendship on a higher plane than love, which she considered a somewhat selfish emotion. She supposed Daddy thought he had not time, as Major Middleton's death had happened just before he was given his C.M.G., when he was so frightfully busy. Why, that boy must be twenty-four, only two years younger than Alan. She hoped he would not still be shy, for she would probably have to go in with him if Mummy did not give her Mr. Man. She was quite sure that if Mr. Man were an author—which he was neither clever nor nice enough to be—*he* would not value her opinion of his work as Shaun did, although the dear had such a fearful lot of trouble to extract it from her stupid head!

Francis Thompson's Poems, *The Crock of Gold,* and *Emma* lay on the dressing-table, equally beloved. Cynthia reached out a hand to take one, but they made her think of Shaun whom she wished to forget, and she selected the box of chocolates instead. There were three coffee creams left; and she disposed of them in the twink of a dimple, as Shaun would say. Bother Shaun! There he was again. But she could not help liking him to think her beautiful, she honestly couldn't. She simply loved it! Was it because of his cultured mind, his artistry, his knowing about books? Acting on an impulse she sprang to her feet and ran to the cheval-glass with a quick young grace that seemed to fill the room with sudden beauty of movement; and there, taking an end of her scarf in either hand, letting it fall from her shoulders, she looked hard at her reflection, her cheeks pink, her eyes a woman's.

She saw a dignified, slender girl in a dress of filmy green; a girl with heaps of chestnut fair hair, grey eyes, and a very direct inquiring gaze. She was willowy and strong, her neck was milk-white, her cheeks daintily flushed, and Cynthia could not help liking her! The dress she recognised as a compromise between ancient Greece and modern Paris: at the time of choice she would have liked it more Greek, carried away intellectually as she was by the classical Shaun, but now she

could not help being glad that her mother had interposed. Lady Bremner's ladylike taste was conspicuous in the result. Cynthia gave it its full due, admitting frankly to herself that neither she nor the dressmaker could have decided so well alone. She was feminine enough to settle that the colour of the material suited her complexion before regarding the general effect, but it was characteristic of Shaun's influence that she did not confine herself, as most women do, to the criticism of details.

"The dear thing is nice," she thought. "It's sweet! And it *is* right artistically, for I'm not in the least the classic type, I'm too English-looking!" She was examining her face, and not the lines of her graceful figure. "I'm glad my eyelashes are long. I like my mouth, and my cheeks are prettily curved, and I hold myself well. I think the nose would be almost better snub instead of straight, as my eyes are so wide apart, but that's a matter of taste, and anyway my upper lip is short. I certainly look bright and wide-awake; no one would call me a sleepy person. All the same if I am beautiful, which Shaun said outright on Tuesday, and he does know, which the rest who've said it don't—besides, they've been more prejudiced still—it must be because of my complexion or my eyes! Cynthia, you're all eyes, and they're dancing. Don't be a vain idiot! . . .

"Those sleeves *are* pretty, just caught above the elbow and open above to the shoulders, and I like the chiffon bow on one shoulder. My hips are slender enough to be classical, I think, as my shoulders are fairly broad. Oh, arms, you really are beautiful, and one can't help seeing you through those very open sleeves that aren't sleeves at all—I almost wish I'd had the fuller ones! Neck and shoulders are nice too, but I can't be as sure they're right as I am of the arms and hands. That's a dimple of vanity, Cynthia. Come away from the glass."

But the mirror had given her a thrill of delicate excitement that pulsed through mind and body alike,

and after that she could not compose herself. So she went down early to the drawing-room, where she found a nice-looking, brown-haired boy standing awkwardly in front of the fire. At the sight of her he seemed half unhappy, half elated,—she mistook the admiration in his eyes for pleasure at having somebody to talk to. As she advanced with her charmingly youthful air of self-possession she noticed how sensitive was his face. Peter and Cynthia took frank stock of each other in this instant of recognition. If the girl was pleased with the man's appearance, Peter was equally impressed by hers. Indeed, he forgot in one moment his agonies of indecision as to the precise way in which various difficult dishes should be attacked; his terror lest he should confuse the wine-glasses, whose pictures he had carefully learnt by heart beforehand; his wild chase across London in pursuit of a man who could decide with authority the horrible, suddenly recollected problem of gloves; and all his anxiously prepared speeches into the bargain. This vision must be Polly Bremner, and he could only stare and goggle!

"I'm—I'm afraid I'm awfully early," he stammered. "My n-name is Middleton." At which point he stuck. He was desperately anxious to make proper conversation, only the words had all fled into crannies of his mind, from which they peeped and mocked him.

Cynthia's naturalness saved the situation. "I knew you were Mr. Middleton," she said cheerfully. "I'm glad I'm early too. Please sit down. Come closer to the fire; it's chilly in the evenings, isn't it?"

Peter fell over a Persian cat, and, by an acrobatic effort, gained a chair.

"I'm most fearfully sorry!" he apologised to the indignant tail of the animal as it disappeared from the room. The corners of Cynthia's mouth curved bewitchingly, and she smiled. He had found his way to her heart by the correct aim of an apology: it would have been quite wrong had he made it to her. As things were she felt irresistibly disposed to be friendly to Peter, but remembering the duties of decorum she merely said,

"Don't bother about the cat. She isn't a bit hurt, really," and proceeded to develop the conversation through cats to tigers, and from tigers to Swan's animal paintings, and thence to the Tate Gallery, where they were both at home, each eager to act as host to the other. In fact something like a quarrel arose over Goodwin's *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves,* to which they laid such particular claim that it sounded as though one of them must at the least have presented the picture to the nation, if neither had painted it.

"That one's mine!" cried Peter. "That one at least is mine."

"No, it isn't," resisted Cynthia, childishly. "I want it. But I'll give it to you," she added sweetly, recollecting that she had not known Mr. Middleton very long and that her mother might not approve of a sudden intimacy, indeed might not authorise one at all. There is something barrier-breaking about even a pretended quarrel. So she went on to tell him how she had been first taken to the Tate by Mr. James.

"Not Shaun James?" asked Peter, enlightened by the pride in her voice. His own was admiring enough to satisfy Cynthia; she counted him a Friend from that moment. It was clever of him not to guess Henry James, who had not written novels half as good as Shaun's in her opinion—with which Shaun disagreed. She nodded, dimpling.

"Why, he wrote about the Tate!" murmured Peter, round-eyed with awe of this wonderful girl who knew a celebrated author. Why, she would be telling him next that she was a member of the Savage Club, which he was ignorant enough to believe a possibility. Cynthia, who was a trifle amused at the impression she had made, was on the point of informing him that Shaun might arrive at any second, when the door, which Peter had closed behind the cat, opened again to the rustling of silken skirts.

"Oh, here you are, Rosemary!" said Lady Bremner as they turned to receive her. The phrase was meaningless. She used it always on greeting her daughter

after an absence, whether this had lasted a few minutes or several days. Peter saw advancing a thin lady in black, with what are commonly called aristocratic features, which wore a kind expression. Cynthia introduced him. He spoke, but hardly knew what he said. "We are very glad indeed that you could come!" replied the lady with apparent sincerity. She had made him feel at ease by her courteous, accomplished use of a few simple words, and he immediately began to find in her a likeness to Cynthia. But her voice was not so clear and pretty as Cynthia's, and it was older and less gay.

He had scarcely time to form an impression before other guests began to arrive. The short, plain young woman in red was called Miss Taliesin. She spoke in orderly sentences like a book, and there was vigorous common sense in what she said. Alan, the son of the house, a model of smooth correctness, nice-looking in an unemotional way, took possession of her as soon as he came. Next arrived Laurence Man, whom Peter recognised with dismay, for it was the custom of the Great Company to watch jealously the expenditure of their junior clerks, especially of those who were not living at home, and the possession of wealthy friends meant being unfavourably remarked upon unless those friends were connected with the Directorate. Peter saw no opportunity of explaining to his chief that this was the first time he had dined out in his life; besides, he was certain that "Lordly Laurence" would resent having been invited to meet him and would not want to speak to him at all.

Regarding him with a critical eye, Peter realised that whereas in the City he had admired Laurence's distinction, here in Portman Square he was doubting his breeding—a return to an older and truer standard of judgment. Laurence Man had been to a good public school, he had refined features, his voice was pleasant, his desire to please assiduous; yet seen at the side of Alan Bremner something was lacking. Peter hastily decided that he was a snob, which received confirmation a mo-

ment later when Laurence ignored him. However, he only half understood the reason why Laurence was devoting himself to Lady Bremner, hanging upon her most ordinary remarks with an air that Cynthia condemned as 'dying duck.' It was in reality part of his policy, while his ignoring of Peter was the consequence of jealousy.

Whilst the two young people were engaged in underrating Laurence Man's intelligence, Sir Everard came in. He apologised politely for being late, and welcomed his guests with formal kindness. Peter's mental picture of a ruddy, jovial giant—a memory of childhood—bore no resemblance to real life. On the contrary, he found himself shaking hands with a grey spare man, who had heavy eyebrows, insignificant clean-shaven features, steady eyes without expression, and a polished unyielding manner of address; only the sunburned skin was true to recollection, and that was bronzed instead of florid. *Who's Who* had revealed Sir Everard as a fine mathematician, educated at Harrow and St. John's, Cambridge, fond of yachting and fishing, and a member of the Travellers' Club; and his letter had suggested to Peter that he was accustomed to be authoritative behind a veil of diplomacy. Now Peter discovered he had charm.

No sooner had Sir Everard left him than a very spick-and-span maid approached Lady Bremner, who was close by, and announced in a low voice, "If you please, a telephone message has just come from Mr. James, requesting you not to wait dinner for him, my lady. He says he has been arrested!"

"Good gracious, Rosemary!" apostrophised the mother, though the daughter responsible for the erring guest was some distance away and out of earshot. "Didn't he say any more than that, Simmins?"

"Only 'Goodbye,' my lady."

"How vexatious! Very good, Simmins; that will do."

Lady Bremner departed on a cutting-out expedition, and presently withdrew her husband from Laurence

Man. Peter watched, fascinated, and Miss Taliesin, who had joined Peter and to set him at ease was monopolising the conversation, formed a poor opinion of him as a listener. In fact she decided that he was disappointingly ill-mannered, and deserted the subject of politics, on which she could talk ably and sensibly, for motoring, of which she knew herself to be grotesquely ignorant. Peter, after noting with admiration his host's calm reception of the news, and learning from the brief lift of his eyebrows that he cared little for Mr. James and was only slightly surprised at his fate, returned to the topic of motoring, sustaining it with difficulty, since he had never been in a motor-car. Then two ladies arrived together, one of them of uncertain age, like a lily of the hothouse on the point of fading, robed in a sheath and jewelled marvellously, who discoursed of the illness of a husband; and the other absurdly young, enchantingly pretty, and impulsive and outspoken enough to be a terror to any hostess. She was Cynthia's cousin Phyllis, much in awe of Lady Bremner fortunately, and she fell to Peter's lot to take in, dinner being now no longer delayed.

"Do you like black eyes and hair?" she inquired of him in an eager voice as soon as they were fairly settled. "I do. I suppose it is because my own are dark. Rosie looks heavenly though, doesn't she?"

"Yes, she does, but I thought she was called Polly," said Peter, who was not meant to interrupt.

"My uncle calls her that. Mr. James calls her Cynthia. Auntie calls her Rosemary. What was I saying? Oh yes, looks—I don't care for that woman I came with a bit. She's passée, you know. I wonder why we sat down with an empty place?"

Lady Bremner disengaged herself from her mild conversation with Laurence Man, glanced across Peter, and said gently but meaningly, "Because we were so very late, Phyllis darling." At which the darling blushed, tossed her head, and attacked her soup. Peter admired the trophy of Zulu shields and assegais on the wall opposite. Then he wondered who had arranged the

orchids in the centrepiece, and why dining-rooms are usually papered in a shade of red, and was summoning courage to inspect his other neighbour when a diversion was effected by a voice behind his back announcing nervously, "Mr. Shaun James!"

The distinguished author had an entrance to make that would have daunted most people, and he made it very quietly. He was not tall, and his straw-coloured hair needed cutting, but to Peter's admiring eyes he looked clever enough for anything, and his evening clothes were as correct as Alan's and less obtrusively foppish. "The police arrested me in mistake for a pickpocket who they say resembles me," he explained to Lady Bremner, "and were kind enough to let me telephone from the station when I was waiting to be identified and released. Luckily the nearest man I knew was at home, and he came round at once."

"Where were you, then, Mr. James, when this dreadful thing happened?"

"Marble Arch, Lady Bremner; admiring the evening sky. They told me it was just what a pickpocket and only a pickpocket would do. A pretty comment on the state of æsthetics in this country! I'm desolated at the trouble I've caused you." He went to his seat between Cynthia and Phyllis; Alan and Sir Everard spoke to him across the table. Peter was concentrating all his wits upon the fish, wherein lurked unsuspected bones, calculated to raise the blush of shame to the cheek of innocence.

"Are you a suffragist?" asked a little buzzing voice in his ear. "I am. I'm sure I deserve a vote. Miss Taliesin is one, too. She doesn't go to prison, because she works. She inspects sweated trades and that sort of thing. Rather dull, but most fearfully useful, you know. I daresay I may go to Holloway one day, I haven't quite made up my mind yet. They say Alan Bremner is in love with her, but he couldn't possibly marry her." The voice grew more piercing as the speaker became interested, and Peter began to tremble, but Lady Bremner this time gave no sign.

"Indeed!" he answered feebly. "No, I'm not a suffragist."

"*Aren't* you?" She turned a pair of saucer-shaped black eyes upon him. "Then I don't like you at all!"

"Thank God!" thought Peter, as she showed him the back of a very pretty and very bare shoulder and gave her attention to James, who was talking and laughing away at a tremendous rate with Cynthia. At the same moment Lady Bremner turned to him. "Do you like your work in the Great Company?" she asked, hitting upon the most unfortunate question that could have been devised. Cynthia and Shaun both had quiet voices and were making very little noise that might cover his answer, while Miss Taliesin had not yet cut short her interesting talk with Alan to turn to Laurence Man, although she was on the point of doing so. Being isolated, Laurence could hardly have avoided hearing Lady Bremner's question. He began to crumble his bread, leaning thoughtfully forward, and thereby convinced Peter that he was listening. In the office a lie would have sprung naturally to Peter's lips, but in this unpretentiously luxurious dining-room, amongst people whose sense of honour was the same as that which he had received by inheritance, he found it impossible to reply otherwise than truthfully. His youthful and excited imagination over-estimated the importance of the incident, he thought he must prove himself worthy of the gentlepeople who were entertaining him, he remembered Cynthia's eyes—

"I hate it," he answered in a low voice.

Lady Bremner noticed the tremor with which he spoke, and failed to observe the swift uneasy glance he cast at his chief across the table. She was accustomed to people who were loyal to their Services and thought them the finest in the world, or she would not have dreamt of asking the question. A plate had arrived before Laurence, but he continued to form his bread pills without regarding it or even looking up, leaning over the table with a dull face. "Why?" he asked, addressing Peter for the first time, and then, languidly

drawing himself up, added, "But Lady Bremner will not be interested in the affairs of our Company," and engaged her on another topic. Peter cursed himself wildly for a fool. He had hoped that Laurence would not overhear, but now the mischief was done, and effectively done. He saw himself marked down as a ringleader of the malcontents in the office—wherein he exaggerated, for Laurence had chiefly noticed the boldness of the reply. Peter was right, however, when he thought that Laurence would not forget. He never forgot anything, least of all what happened at the Bremners'.

Finding two wineglasses full by his side, Peter emptied them one after another with the courage of despair.

"Rosemary and Mr. James are *very* devoted to each other," sighed Phyllis, returning. "It sounds frightfully rude of me to complain of that to you, and I hope you don't mind. He says she's a girl one can be young with. She told me so, before she found out how untrustworthy I am. We were most fearfully intimate at one time, though you'd hardly believe it now. She told me Mr. James said he had never been young. You know Rosie's the most heavenly girl. . . ." She did not cease to chatter during the remainder of the meal, and Peter sank into deeper and deeper despondency.

At last the ladies departed. Peter, holding open the door, received a serene smile of the eyes from Cynthia as she passed, which seemed to tell him, "I'm your friend. Don't forget it, please!" On the instant he felt more cheerful. Alan came across to him and talked for some time about aviation with a kind of stiff courtesy —the stiffness being due to preoccupation, not to lack of cordiality as Peter imagined. The conversation was not a success, and having done his duty Alan joined in the political discussion at the other end of the table, from which Sir Everard immediately detached himself in order to chat with his youngest guest. His manner to Peter was dry but cordial, and he won his confidence in the first five minutes. Sir Everard was indeed genuinely remorseful at his prolonged neglect of his old school-friend's son, of whose existence he had

been reminded accidentally on turning out the contents of a drawer of his writing-desk. He intended to befriend Peter if possible, that is to say if Peter himself let it be possible. There was nothing to be complained of in the boy's appearance and manners; he was shy, but that would alter with a little more experience of the kind of society which his birth gave him the right to enter; he seemed quick-witted, and his disposition could be judged gradually by observation—it appeared to be affectionate and simple; he spoke properly of the mother he did not remember, warmly and respectfully of his father, who had been his constant companion to the age of seventeen years . . . and a first-rate fellow Middleton had always been. But, hullo, what was this? "I'm afraid I can't honestly say that I was always as decent to him as I ought to have been. He used to snort"——Snort. Poor old Middleton, so he did! What was the young cub saying?———"and I know I was beastly to him about it sometimes. It's too late to be sorry now." Well, he looked sorry enough.

To Peter it was as though the mind of his interlocutor had opened halfway in comprehension and then closed like an oyster. He did not say any more, and Sir Everard offered him the cigarettes.

"Man speaks well of your work," said Sir Everard, changing the subject; not with complete ingenuousness, for Laurence had been notably cautious in his praise. Had Sir Everard asked him before the affair in the course of the first entrée his answer might have been different; as matters stood Laurence did not propose to commit himself in regard to the young gentleman. Perhaps he had noticed Cynthia's smiling eyes as she swept out of the room.

Peter declined another cigarette, and "Shall we go to the drawing-room?" asked Sir Everard. There was a general movement of assent, after which the black-and-white figures filed through a doorway hung with rich Persian curtains into the hall, where Peter had the honour of having his arm taken by the wonderful Shaun

James. "You've got a kind of experience that's never been properly written," said the novelist amicably, as though they had known each other for years. "I used to thank heaven for my ignorance of it, but now I'm not so sure. I wish I had been a clerk for a time." He added thoughtfully with what seemed to Peter irrelevance, "Miss Bremner has just told me," and then they entered together the large drawing-room, with its clear green wall-spaces and silver tinted dado and conventional elegant chairs and tables.

Mrs. Gwiney, the sheathed lily, was playing Liszt with appropriate vehemence, and the other ladies were occupied with their thoughts. Phyllis, who could toe-dance better than the average amateur, was wondering whether she would get an opportunity of performing. She need not have agitated herself; Lady Bremner disapproved of her frock so heartily that she had not the smallest thought of drawing attention to it. Cynthia was meditating her mother's singular speech, "Rosemary dearest, Mr. Man says he's determined to marry soon." *Was* it intended as a hint? Or could it mean that she was to be left in peace after all? Miss Taliesin was too tired after her day's work to do more than sit and dream, while Lady Bremner was mentally designing a new tea-gown for her daughter, the dressing of whom was her great joy in life. The arrival of the men broke up the group, and Shaun, leaving Peter's side, crossed immediately to Cynthia, by whom he sat for a moment before joining Miss Taliesin, whose drowsiness he covered by a steady flow of conversation which needed neither comment nor reply. Alan, misled by Shaun's first movement, was not quick enough to forestall him, and moving too close to the piano was called upon to sing. Man fell a victim to Phyllis, and was rescued by his hostess. Sir Everard, who was really fond of music, seated himself near the piano, prepared to listen. And there was left an opportunity for Peter, who had taken a modest place by the door, to take his courage in both hands and cross to the corner where Cynthia sat, somewhat removed from the others.

This time she did not welcome him. In the whirl and confusion of her thoughts she ascribed his consequent silence to tactful sympathy, and liked him all the more. It was not till she was in her room again that she realised how unkind she must have appeared; and then compunction made her cheeks burn red, for she knew she had behaved abominably and spoilt the rest of Mr. Middleton's evening, which must have been dull indeed. She had told Shaun what her mother had said about Laurence—from no motive of coquetry, their friendship being above that. But what could Shaun have meant by replying in that queer agitated way of his, which usually was a sign that he was wholly serious, "Make me tell you to-morrow why *I* can't marry." Whatever could have been in his mind?

She could not decide whether she were glad or sorry to hear that he could not marry. She was certainly shaken by the news, so upset that she slipped into bed without remembering to say her prayers; but notwithstanding her worries sleep came quickly to her healthy youth, and after that first meeting of theirs it was Peter Middleton who lay awake. Until the morning broke he tossed and turned, watching the persons of his dinner-party march to and fro across his mental vision. Cynthia was amongst them, no longer ethereal or a nymph with starry eyes, but just a sad, displeased girl with averted face and glorious hair, and a turn of the head and neck that compelled forgiveness.

Shaun wrote till the morning; Laurence Man slept the sleep of an inheritor of the earth.

III

CYNTHIA awoke next morning with a sense of quiet happiness that was delightful; she was to see Shaun again, to have another holiday. Then as she pushed her hair back from her drowsy eyes, sitting up in bed, she remembered that their talk was to be a disturbing one introductory perhaps of change in their jolly relations, whereupon the big grey eyes opened wide, her hands dropped upon the quilt, and she became broad awake. With a deft toss of her pretty head she shook her wealth of hair behind her, and half turning took the cup of tea from the rosewood table by her side. As she sipped she made up her mind. Her decision was to defend the existing situation resolutely.

Shaun must not flatter her in that particular way; if he talked of love to her—love for her—she should call it flattery, for so it would be from a clever man in his position—she did not say, of his age—to a stupid, unformed girl like herself: he was sweet enough to treat her as an equal, and that was sufficient. What moved men to fall in love she did not understand; from the way Shaun spoke sometimes one would imagine the shape of an arm were able to make them! They did not seem to wait to find out whether the girl were nice. Of course she herself had been attracted by people whom she did not know personally, but then she had always known she was being silly, and men were quite serious about their love-affairs. One hurt them dreadfully by having to refuse them—though she supposed that did not last long, as a man who had proposed to her had married some one else only three months afterwards.

Shaun would declare that he did know her—if he proposed, which really she hadn't any right to expect

after his saying distinctly that he could not marry! But then did he know her? Could he? If he did he would not want to marry her. And he wanted that, she was sure. . . . It was a vicious circle. . . . And besides he always did the talking! After all, she scarcely said a word when she was with him, because she liked to listen. How could you know anyone who always listened? Of course he was wonderfully clever and often guessed what she was thinking about, but then he was sometimes quite wrong. Men did not understand what trivial kinds of things a girl could be interested in, though Shaun was certainly better at understanding than other men. And there it was again! If he understood why did he fall in love? Surely it could not be her arms! It wasn't possible he should love such a kid as she was in the proper way, the way he had loved his wife—it simply wasn't to be done. Mr. Middleton might, because he was so young and he was like her in some ways, but Shaun with his cleverness and experience, no!

At this point Marie announced Cynthia's bath, and the conclusion of the argument was postponed in favour of practical things.

Behold her, in a pale blue coat and skirt and a dainty hat with a curling feather, entering in the wake of a couple of ragamuffins the left-hand door that opens into the entrance hall of the British Museum. Shaun was in attendance within, having just decided himself to be not in love, because of the strength of mind he had exhibited in not awaiting her upon the steps, which would have enabled him to watch her approach from a distance. The sight of Cynthia dispelled the illusion. They shook hands in silence.

And now from sheer interest and without trace of jealousy, he asked in his eager voice, "Isn't young Middleton a nice boy? Do you still like him as much this morning, Cynthia?"

He saw the girl's face brighten, and a faint suspicion whispered in his heart and died away again. Cynthia had felt relief; she answered gladly, "I like him ever

so much. Perhaps Mother will let him be friends with me."

"She may. Sir Everard took to him, I think. Which way? To the Elgin room? He's immature—by which I mean Middleton, not your father, Cynthia; but Time, which has caused the *Discobolus* to need something more than a feather duster to keep him clean—it will be washing-day soon, I trust—may expand Peter's brain-cells. That is to say, if brain-cells do expand! He isn't like Peter Pan, but the name Peter suits him well enough. I shall call him that."

"Oh, I don't know," said Cynthia. "He seemed to me rather like Peter Pan."

"Not so selfish, dear. Isn't Clytie modern? Best middle Victorian, I think. It's not often we get two days running, is it, chum?" Shaun was in his triumphal vein, prancing with joy at the mere being with a beautiful girl, glancing pityingly at unaccompanied males, childishly happy; but although in appearance forgetful of his speech of yesterday he could not be trusted yet. So Cynthia decided, answering cautiously.

"No, it isn't. Often it's months before I see you. I wonder Mother let me come, after your being arrested last night. Still, seeing you is the only thing I ever do fight for, and I suppose I fight hard. Oh, Shaun, you don't know what it is to have so little liberty that you can't even go out alone without saying why!"

No author likes to be told that there is anything in human nature he does not understand. "I can guess," said Shaun sympathetically. "Why don't you marry, Cynthia?"

She stopped and looked at him with reproachful eyes. "Don't laugh at me, please," she said. An attendant moved nearer to listen.

Shaun swept on, compelling her to follow him. "I'm not laughing!" he cried, but still in a moderate voice, for the rooms were not altogether empty. "And I'm not thinking of Laurence Man. I love you, you dear little idiot, you sweet Cythia. Beautiful, wise girl, how can I help it? But I'm doing my best not to, which is

why I'm proposing with every possible disadvantage in a building where no one can ever be alone, and in a room that contains not only a procession of appropriate Amazons—they are earless, eyeless masterpieces—but a suspicious attendant and an early British, pre-Raphaelite spinster. Oh, come away, dear, for goodness' sake, and let's try the Assyrian bulls, there's a seat close to them that's quiet. Yes, I love you, love you, love you, ass—I mean knave—that I am, and I mustn't, and I'm going to tell you why. Now let's be rational and calm."

"I don't love you," said Cynthia, steadily, as she had often said it in her thoughts.

"We will argue that point later," said Shaun, hurrying her towards the seat, which they secured in time to forestall a pair of happier lovers. "Let us be calm, Cynthia, and don't mind my playing the fool, because if I didn't let off the steam that way I might hold your hand, or—no, you needn't shrink away."

"I wasn't shrinking," said poor Cynthia, defiantly, "and I wouldn't mind your kissing me, if we weren't here. Think what you like. I'm not ashamed. But I don't love you, Shaun. You know I don't."

"You never will after what I'm going to tell you," cried Shaun excitedly, "My good angel has won a damnable triumph, and you never will!" His voice changed and tears came into his eyes. "I daresay you never would have! . . . I'm going to tell you a story and make a speech, and I'll try to be natural, chum darling, although it's the hardest thing to ask of me. Your eyes are too close to mine, . . . and your soft brilliant cheeks and that mouth which is sorry for me, and I can guess the fragrance of your hair . . . Cynthia! No, I mustn't! Stop! Now, listen, dear. Hang that Assyrian bull, it's laughing at me. You remember Doris, my wife; you were fond of her, and your mother did not mind. She came to the house as your mother's friend. You did not know what she was to me, and I've never spoken to you about her. I'm going to now, and for a reason. You must just listen. Will you do that for me?"

"Of course I will," replied Cynthia, staring in front of her, beyond the exquisite drapery of the stone Nereides, up the long Egyptian Gallery.

"And don't think me a fool, dear, don't do that! I'm telling you this now for a purpose, not from simple clumsiness."

Cynthia turned her head and looked at him between smiles and tears. He met the glance of her eyes and sighed, for they were very beautiful. She waited a moment, considering; then she said with firmness, "If you can think that of me, can imagine I would misunderstand, doesn't it tell you, Shaun, that you don't really"—she lowered her voice, as one speaks of God—"love me?"

"I don't! Not as I did her. But it's not passion in me, Cynthia, only. I'm unconscious of passion. You're beautiful and the artist in me sees your beauty as the image of a divine thing. Passion is behind, no doubt, but a greater element is there. Beauty is one of the Trinity with Truth and Love, and may be worshipped rightly as an aspect of the Absolute, which is God. Do you see? I'm cutting it all too short, but you'll understand. You always do. There are three kinds of true priests, the artist who interprets Beauty, the philosopher who follows Truth, the religious who practises Love. They should not exclude each other, that's all. They should be one individual, not three, a Trinity of priesthood. . . . Chum, I'm more than a worshipper of you, though. I'm a lonely man, who loves his friend, who's a commonplace man, and likes being understood, made much of . . . caressed when he's down, likes having the child in him comforted, then . . . flattered when he struts, too, perhaps . . . who wants to have a home where there's always love, a home in someone's heart. The human in me calls you, but it must not. *I* know it's weakness as you do, and I'm poor—no, let me go on; you'd give up many important things if you married me, lose them altogether; I ought not to ask it, I don't. . . . My dear, I loved Doris because she was Love and Truth,—and the greatest of the

three is Love, and the second Truth. She and I were One, not two. You and I couldn't be One, that was a dream of mine that dissolves on waking and leaves me lonely . . . lonely. . . .'' His voice died away, murmuring, into saddest silence. She almost loved him, then; her heart was melting with pitiful tears. She——

He divined and spoke: ''She was not pretty, but her face was dear to me; looking on it I remembered God. She was not clever, but she understood men and women, and, understanding, loved them. She was entirely unselfish. Two days before she died—so unexpectedly, so tragically early, at the best time of our love, when sun-kissed Joy, visible as a bright spirit in the twilight of youth, in the dawning of life, was melting, growing visible in a steadier light which shone upon a world of ordered beauty all around us,—two days before, she said to me: 'Boy, dear, if I were to die, you must marry again.' 'Don't think of such things,' I answered, for I knew her heart was strained, but did not know how much, or I should have wept, not spoken. 'You'd be so lonely,' she went on, 'you need a Mother, Boy, dear. No one will ever love you quite as I do and I'm horrid enough to be glad of that, but many girls must love you. They could not help themselves. One of them might be a little Mother and sweet Wife, as I have tried to be.' Tears sprang to my eyes; why, I did not know. 'Would you wish that?' I asked, thinking it a light question—'yourself, I mean.' She looked at me, and answered 'Yes.' . . . Cynthia, it was the first time she had ever lied! . . .

''The interruption of a servant showing in a visitor, one of those apparently trifling bits of 'business' in the play of life, that may turn out to be so dramatic, that may affect the action even to the fall of the curtain, closed the scene. It was our habit to talk out misunderstandings and obscurities lest they should grow into obstacles so high as to shut us from the sight of each other's eyes. Here, to my mind, there was nothing but clearness: yet what a difference a few more words might have made to us both, to her, waiting, perhaps watching

me now with love and tears; to myself, unworthy. The occasion did not come. Two gentle nights, two flying days passed by. I was good to her—that was not always the case, but in those two short days God in His kindness made me tender—and then an evening of firelight peace, and talk of books and animals—we had been to the Zoo that day and Doris had coaxed the squirrels to her. I could not remember what it was I'd wanted to ask. I kissed her good-night. Her lips clung to mine, loth to depart. She turned upon her pillow, nestled, slept, and then I, listening to the softness of her breathing in the peaceful silent darkness, heard a little gasp and felt her shudder, and started up. God! . . . God! . . . God!"

Cynthia leaned forward to shield him from the curious gaze of the two ragamuffins who had entered the Museum before her; they were gaping in round-eyed derision of the funny gentleman. Shaun rose to his feet. "A beautifully protective gesture!" he commented unsteadily. "Come upstairs and look at mummies. There's something very dignified and consoling about a mummy. One can't doubt immortality in that room." She walked close beside him, feeling grown up and near to tears; her heart glowed and melted; he could have won her, through pity and because he had told a story well. Her youth was moved to a passion of tenderness. The longing to comfort leaped up in her like a bright flame. Perhaps he knew it, for he halted on the staircase and leant over, watching the huge Face of Rameses, and said, "Yet I do love you in my way, Cynthia. Don't let me marry you. You don't love me. And that's the only thing that would justify it. Don't let me, please."

She trembled, and said, "No, Shaun," obediently, choking back tears. She must have been very near to loving him, though whether the magic would have lasted one may doubt. She was young in mind as well as body, and though the spirit of the artist was immortally child-like, his mind had never been that of a boy and could not have met hers equally. The two were akin, but his mind was so much the elder; she would have been ever straining on tiptoe to reach up to his experience. She

was too beautiful for him to be conscious of this; and he was masculine, a jealous artist, and would have resented an intellectual parity in so young a girl. Nevertheless it prevented a deep and living love. In Love there is equality. Doris had been wise, not clever, equal to him upon another plane.

So they looked at mummies. Shaun wished now to jeer at himself, but the girl's truer instinct forbade. She shrank from his mocking self-analysis, seeing this unjustified even by reaction from a selfish emotion. Not that she admitted his selfishness—Cynthia was too loyal-natured—but she understood the point of view which made him long to retrace his steps. The deeper motive of his present cynicism, the cunning one, result of his peculiar quality of self-control, she did not divine. She did not know it was his means of guarding her from the impulses of her pity, partly through shock of disillusionment, partly by stimulating her intelligence, which was forced to arouse itself fully in order to combat him. He exaggerated, and she argued. He was bitterly self-deprecatory, she ingeniously sympathetic: and when they stood in the Indian Room before the festival car at which two tiny comic horses continually strain in mid-air, and Shaun's harsh laugh rang out again, as it did on every visit at the sight, a sudden leap of relief set the stars dancing in the girl's eyes. "Let's be chums, then," cried Shaun, holding out both hands, for the room was empty.

"Yes," she said from her heart, offering gloved hands in reply, to which he stooped his lips. Both were deceived. Both imagined themselves freed by a single gesture from the consequence of what had gone before. They became feverishly merry; and Cynthia arrived home five minutes late for lunch.

"You are a little after time, darling, but it does not matter," said Lady Bremner in affectionate dismissal of the culprit's voluble explanations. "And how flushed you are! Those public buildings are always kept so over-heated!"

"I have had my hands kissed," thought Cynthia, smiling to herself. "And I've got a real, true chum!"

IV

Cynthia had plenty of opportunity during the weeks that followed to consider the events of that emotional morning, as Lady Bremner detained her close by her side and, thus supported, worked off a number of duty calls and luncheons which had been long in accumulation. Then Sir Everard fell ill, and both the ladies were required to nurse him; Lady Bremner keeping tidy the sickroom and arranging flowers, while Cynthia read aloud, wrote letters to dictation, and opened or shut the windows. The latter also attended to the fire, which had to be kept bright and clear without being allowed to throw out much heart; since it was there only to be 'cheerful.' Sir Everard liked fires, and unfortunately hated the presence of a housemaid in his bedroom. To do him justice, it must be admitted he was an unconscious tyrant: Lady Bremner enjoyed waiting upon him, it never occurred to him to doubt that Cynthia did the same; had he done so he would not have suffered her to spend her time in that way, as he would have preferred to see her studying mathematics. And if she could have felt herself necessary to him, Cynthia would have made her sacrifice with gladness; as it was she grew more and more irritated at her confinement to the house, and managed to find leisure for a good many rebellious thoughts while relaxing not at all her outward cheerfulness and devotion. "Rosemary is the most wonderful child," said Lady Bremner to herself. "Never does she fail me!"

Peter paid his call on a Sunday and found mother and daughter alone; Alan, who often spent that day at Portman Square, had gone into the country, and Sir Everard, who was beginning to be indisposed, remained invisible. Peter was inspirited by the absence of any

sign of wrath from Laurence Man, and when he found Cynthia lovelier and kinder than even his recollection of her he became completely at ease, forgot rows of figures and the taskmaster, and appeared at his attractive best, succeeding so well with Lady Bremner that she left him with Cynthia. "Here is a friend for you of whom I can approve," said the rustle of her retreating skirts, "a charming-mannered boy, who is not dangerous, for he cannot possibly marry. He will give you young companionship and, see how reasonable a mother I am, I leave you alone with him, relying on your good sense, Rosemary." And Cynthia joyfully made the most of her opportunity. This time Peter went away fairly dazzled, and spent the rest of the week weaving romances in which he became suddenly rich. Then he too fell a victim to the prevalent scourge of influenza, and was nursed by his landlady with groans.

Peter remained for some time the chief person in Cynthia's meditations. His brown hair and tall figure and, yes, decidedly nice-looking countenance—in a plain way—were more pleasing to dwell upon than Shaun's face of agony beneath the stone Nereides, or his dramatic behaviour in the Indian Gallery. Somehow the compact to be real chums had proved difficult of fulfilment—at least so far as could be tested by correspondence. Shaun wrote either curtly or with frank and undisguised applause of the 'shell of her' as Cynthia sometimes, in esoteric moods, contemptuously called her sweet exterior self. No doubt he now felt himself safe, relying on their compact, but the things he said were inspired by the very genius of lovemaking, and Cynthia felt that she ought not to enjoy them as much as she did. Sometimes they thrilled her, always they flattered. He misread her youth in assuming compliments could not touch her heart, but the error conveyed the subtlest praise of all, and because of that she mistrusted its existence. Was he not trying to make her really love him? That would be to write him down treacherous, for the cleverness of it could not be unconscious. Nothing was ever wholly unconscious in Shaun. He had the literary gift of

knowing what was suggested by his words and the effect they would create on different temperaments. But then it was certain he could not be dishonest; he hadn't the capacity! So he must be bewildered and drifting, which was the saddest thought of all to Cynthia.

Since she could do nothing for poor Shaun, Mr. Middleton was the pleasanter person to think of. He had a way of considering before he gave an opinion, which she admired, and he liked the same books as she and knew just enough more about them to help her, which would be very convenient when Shaun was not there. His refusal to talk about the Office to her showed how he must loathe the place, and it was loyal of him not to discuss Laurence Man, which bad Cynthia had been prepared to do in a spirit of mockery. It must be horrid to work in an office, very likely amongst men who had not been to good schools and were not gentlemen's sons. They might be awfully nice, but one would not care to be with them always, was Cynthia's sensible conclusion. Nor would one enjoy being constantly under the eye of Laurence Man, who had the knack of making his existence remembered in every circumstance. Indeed, Laurence's discovery that Lady Bremner would listen willingly to praise, however flattering, of her daughter's looks and dresses and of her husband's career in the service of his country, had given him a strong footing in Portman Square in spite of the indifference, amounting almost to dislike, of the two men. Alan, it is true, could not object openly to a well-spoken individual who possessed a perfect taste in cigars—which he gratified from his own case—belonged to the right clubs, and had played cricket for Rugby, while Sir Everard did not think about Man at all except to say vaguely to himself that if Polly were keen on marrying him he supposed he would have to permit it. Sir Everard prided himself on not interfering in the affairs of the womenfolk. From a Service point of view he would have preferred working against Man to working with him, but that did not enter into the question and was not because he underrated Laurence's abilities.

On the whole Laurence must be making steady progress with her mother, Cynthia thought, otherwise he would not have sent books, which their degree of intimacy did not warrant without encouragement from *some one*. If Mummy imagined that Laurence could ever replace Shaun, she was making a mistake; no one could ever do that. The very idea made her glow with indignation. She supposed her mother must genuinely like the man and want him to marry her, for he was not such a very wonderful catch if you regarded him in a horrid, worldly way. He held what they called a good position—such a one as poor Peter Middleton could never expect to reach, for example—and had some private means as well, and would probably arrive at the Board of the Great Company in time and become a financial power. But goodness, what was that? Mummy never favoured Lord Kempston half as much and he was really rich! No, Mummy must like him. Let her. She, Cynthia, jolly well didn't; that was all! And she only disliked him the more for having betrayed her into slang and general horridness!

The interview she had with him when her father was convalescent taught Cynthia that a young girl's distaste for a man of the world who is her lover, even though she permit him to see it, will not necessarily cause him to sink into the earth. Sleek and slippery as Laurence was —Cynthia's adjectives, employed to hit off a manner that had charm without much genuineness—he had the knack of holding her attention by deft personal flatteries and cajoleries, which she would have known how to cut short from another but was strangely unable to deal with in the case of Laurence. He aroused the worst in her with skill, forced her to flirt without understanding she was flirting, and occasionally to behave in a manner that would have horrified Lady Bremner. In fact, to declare the truth with bluntness, he was employing the tricks of a seducer; by no means an uncommon occurrence in a world where not a few men acquire a very subtle knowledge of the inexperience of girls. Cynthia was innocent; she guessed rightly that the man loved her with the best in him as well as the worst; and she was thor-

oughly feminine and youthful. It was not surprising that a man of considerable ability, tremendously in earnest, should exercise a certain control over their relations when alone. Laurence was aiming all the time at the development of precisely that kind of influence over her which Shaun was anxious to avoid. He was attacking her physical unconsciousness, playing with her ignorance, seeking to arouse passion which should masquerade as love, and he was doing it not for a blackguardly purpose, but because he knew nothing better, being like most of his type a materialist, and therefore blind. He believed that real love would come after marriage, ignorant of how Cynthia would have grown to hate him.

On the occasion referred to above he had been angling in vain for an invitation to join the family holiday at Tintagel, where Sir Everard was to recuperate for a few weeks in July. It was the Bremner custom to go away together, and amiably inclined as Lady Bremner might be towards Laurence she did not intend to compromise herself to the extent of inviting him on her own responsibility alone. If Rosemary asked for him that would be a different matter. And Laurence, who guessed this, went too far.

"I've always wanted to see Tintagel," he remarked casually, fixing his eyes on Cynthia. "I might take the opportunity of your being there to run down for a few days."

Cynthia looked away. "It's a long journey," she said doubtfully, but added from politeness, "I'm told there are awfully good hotels." She was saying to herself, "Cynthia, my child, you won't bathe if Laurence Man is there: he would look at you."

Laurence, in his folly, chose that moment to utter his thoughts aloud. "I'd like to bathe," he observed. "You swim, of course, Miss Bremner?"

"Yes." Very unwillingly.

"Would you mind if I came down for a few days?"

The connection of ideas was a trifle too obvious, and Cynthia became exasperated. Glances, and the 'silent

strong man' manner, and conventional flirting she could not prevent, and was conscious that she did not try to as much as she ought. But the unconventional was madness on Laurence's part, for it gave her the opportunity to see what lay beneath.

"I should not care either way," she said, with indifference.

Laurence did not permit himself to be disconcerted.

"That's a step in the right direction," he commented gaily.

"I'm afraid I was rude," apologised Cynthia, now overcome by compunction. "Do forgive me. Of course it would be very pleasant if you came."

"You were," he answered masterfully. "But in any case I should have come."

Cynthia was child enough to be surprised at this.

Peter, who arrived just after Laurence had taken his departure, could not have chosen a happier opportunity. He looked pale and ill, a fit subject for sympathetic fussing. Cynthia's heart went out to him at once, partly because he was not Laurence and partly because he was what she called 'understandable,' that is to say, youthful like herself; and Lady Bremner, who had returned to the drawing-room when she heard the front door close behind the favoured suitor, placed him in the most comfortable armchair and overflowed with motherly attentions. She felt genuine compassion for a male being who did not possess a wife and a grown-up daughter to take care of him; so seizing a moment when she and Cynthia were alone together at the extreme end of the room engaged in search for an illustrated paper which Mr. Middleton *must* see because it contained a description of the work of the Great Company, she smilingly whispered, "Shall I ask him to Tintagel, darling?"

"Why, yes!" said Cynthia, "Mummy, do!"

"I'm afraid it is gone," apologised Lady Bremner, returning. "It had no business to be left in that pile of music, and I daresay one of the maids has tidied it away. Rosemary, Rosemary! I warned you to put it aside."

Peter protested gratitude and begged them not to bother themselves any more.

"I expect Mr. Middleton knows more than the writer of the article," smiled Cynthia. "He's there all day, Mummy!"

"And every day," sighed Peter.

"Do you get a good long leave in the summer to set you up for the winter's work?" Lady Bremner inquired, settling her elegant upright figure into a low armchair. Cynthia, with a movement curiously resembling her mother's, sank gracefully down upon a footstool.

"Rather not!" replied Peter, watching the girl as far as he could with politeness. "Half of us don't get a summer holiday at all, Lady Bremner. I happen this year to be one of the lucky ones, but two years running I had to go away in April. We're supposed to get three weeks and we are only allowed to take a fortnight at a time, so it doesn't work out to anything very wonderful, does it? Of course what we call the 'Highos,' the High Officials, get more than that."

Then came the invitation which caused Peter positively to leap in his chair for joy. He imagined himself one broad grin from ear to ear. "It'll be the rippingest time I've ever had. Thank you, Lady Bremner, most awfully." He might have added that it would be almost his first 'ripping time,' for Major Middleton had been too poor for holiday-making while he was educating his son, and the few men whom Peter cared about in the Great Company had never managed to get leave at the same time as himself.

"My niece, whom you met when you dined with us, and another little cousin of Rosemary's, will be with us. Joyce is younger. Her parents are in India. Joyce is thirteen, is it, Rosemary? Or is she fourteen yet? I think we may call it fourteen, and be on the safe side. So it will be a family affair, Mr. Middleton, and we shall be doing very ordinary holiday things. If you are willing to join us I know my husband for one will be delighted."

Peter could not help showing in his countenance a

certain quizzical humour at this statement, which his modesty did not permit him to accept without several large grains of salt. By so doing he ran into danger. "I'm glad Peter Middleton has a sense of comedy," thought Cynthia severely, "but he must not employ it upon Mother! I shall not like him if he does that." However, Peter composed his features and thanked his hostess with perfect propriety. Soon after he got up to go, and found Cynthia grave-lipped with but a smile in her eyes. Her handclasp was warm.

No difficulty was made at the Office about Peter's leave, and his application passed through without comment, Laurence signing it amongst a batch of others without glancing at the name at the head of the paper. Thenceforth Peter was safe. The 'society man' who arbitrated in regard to gloves before the Bremner's dinner was again consulted night after night, and it was by his experienced directions that Peter enlarged his wardrobe. "Swells change their clothes pretty well whenever they enter the house. My boy, you've no idea how many shirts you'll want. And as for clean flannels! Well, they'll have to be clean, that's all! If you can't stand the racket you'll have to tell your hostess you can only stay for one week. The people I go to are a jolly sight smarter than your lot, and I've had to accept half an invitation many a time. It's all the fault of being a ———clerk, Middleton! There's no chance of rising at our beastly shop, I've always said it! Look at our salaries, just look at them! You can't do much visiting in the West End on £120 a year, my boy," and so on interminably. Peter put up with a good deal for the sake of the information he obtained. Needless to say, being a boy of spirit, he drew his savings from the bank and bought clothes enough for the whole fortnight; and also needless to say, he made a great many errors in the course of his work. It was settled he was to join the Bremners a few days after their arrival; until then he walked on air.

Cynthia met Shaun once before they started and then only for a few moments. His manner was con-

strained, she noticed it at once, and later when alone she was suddenly struck by an intuitive impression that he was feeding himself insufficiently! This was not the case, but her idea deserves to be noted if only because it proves the insight of women to be fallible. Her brother Alan, who was worrying over an apparently insoluble dilemma and starving himself in the process, obtained neither sympathy nor attention from Cynthia, whose perceptions often failed her where he was concerned. She was, however, not surprised to hear that Helen Taliesin was to stay with them for a few days at Tintagel.

V

To a clerk of the Great Company who is an old public schoolboy the first day of holiday is more than a release from the unpleasant, it means the recovery of his true self. During months he has been trying to please his superiors not only by his work but by his attitude towards it, striving hard to appear what they wish him to be, honest and fond of figures, rather simple, with a wholesome admiration for those in authority and their sense of humour. He has never forgotten that he could not obtain so high a salary elsewhere (small though it appears in his eyes), because he knows neither a trade nor a profession. And he has not doubted that the Company is mindful of this, since the Directors have evidently expected him to feel gratitude, and taking up the position that they are paying for his character as well as for his pen have claimed the right to command both equally. He has been allowed some respectable interest, such as football or religion, to occupy his spare moments spent out of the Office, but individuality is dangerous in their view. If he possesses it he will have done wisely to keep the fact concealed.

The Directors consider it advisable to pay men of education to add up figures and copy documents; and having got them it is necessary to break their pride in order to fit them to be drudges. The victim cannot complain of this policy, as he knows himself unfitted by hereditary instinct and imaginative activity for the duties he is called upon to perform. He is paid for being a gentleman; but because he has to be broken in to the severe discipline of the Company he cannot be treated like one: and since an educated man rarely becomes effective in a monotonous employment he finds

himself blamed for the possession of those qualities on account of which he was formerly selected. The vicious circle is complete.

Peter snuggled back into his corner, watched the long, ugly platform glide by, and triumphed at the idea of being Peter Middleton again all day and every day for a whole long fortnight. Unknowingly he was more than recompensed for the drab discomfort of his method of earning a living by his exquisite thrill of happiness now. Salisbury passed without disturbing his dream, and its slender spire added a soaring beauty that lifted him upward and upward to ethereal heights of fancy whence he surveyed a fairy-like, miniature, glittering world within the swoop, as it seemed, of a hand and yet delicately all-comprehending and universal. Travel was in it, and Art Galleries, and hunting, and the society of his fellows, and comfortable chambers, and the right kind of Egyptian cigarettes; books of philosophy, and distinguished men in evening dress who let him listen, and girls with friendly unconscious eyes, and motor-cars, and *The Studio* and *Blackwood's* and *Punch* and *The Hibbert Journal,* and a 10-ton yawl, and a seat at the Opera. Luncheon in the hot, shaking dining-car brought near to him—by no skill of cookery—the splendours of the Ritz and intimate dinners in old Soho; and then the tranquillity of distant Exeter, in a clear sunlit frame of ballooning white clouds on a sky of blue, shifted his vision to scenes of peace and the fireside, of two armchairs close and hands that seek each other, and a bright crown of hair, and the curve of a dainty cheek, and perhaps the bend of a graceful neck that he knew. Then came Okehampton; and the moor, the great unfamiliar, threatening, magic expanse, drew his thoughts out upon its waste and his eyes to the carriage window, and thenceforward Peter gazed at the harrying show and forgot to dream.

At last the train rumbled to a standstill in Camelford Station; Peter, getting out, saw Sir Everard in summer clothes waiting by the barrier, with a young girl at his side. Outside were a number of wagonettes which, now that the train was in, commenced to fill with passengers

and luggage. "Tintagel, Boscastle, or Camelford, sir?" asked the porter who had Peter's trunk. "What hotel, please?"

"Tintagel. I'm with this gentleman," explained Peter, as they approached Sir Everard.

"Glad to see you!" said the latter with a sort of curt goodwill. "Put that up in front, porter. You haven't met my niece Joyce Ommanney before, have you, Middleton? Here she is. Joyce, this is Mr. Middleton." A pair of oblique, wise, dark eyes looked into Peter's, and he got an impression of a mane of nut-brown dishevelled hair, a cinnamon-coloured cotton dress, fine, slender tan legs, and gym-shoes. Joyce might be only fourteen, but her eyes had a glint in them that told of mischief, and Peter with a flash of insight foresaw what a critic she would be of him and Phyllis! There was nothing unkind about the face. From the beginning he liked Joyce and knew that she would be his friend with Cynthia.

"How do you do?" she said, shyly but with the air of well-mannered self-possession that a good school teaches; and then they all climbed into the wagonette and were driven off in the warm summer sunshine down a long white road, with another vehicle clattering ahead of them. At first they talked the usual travellers' talk, which soon died away into a silence that was not oppressive. "Here's Cornwall," said Sir Everard with a glance at the boy's happy face. "Look at it, Middleton. We won't interrupt." He seemed more human, less imposing than in London, though his countenance was still sternly set and its expression impenetrable. Joyce was watching Peter openly with a schoolgirl's curiosity.

The upland air came to Peter fresh with the scent of hay. It was cordial like wine, sweet to breathe after London's soot and petrol, and very friendly. This Cornish breeze spoke of the cool embrace of the salt, green sea; the souls of many fragrant flowers flitted in it; and it was blowing direct from white-piled clouds on an azure sky. Soon it wafted the Great Company from Peter's mind, cleaning out the chinks and crevices

and dropping the lumber far off in the land of memory. He felt a sunny content.

Through the dust which rose behind the wagonette he saw the ragged outline of distant Roughtor, a dark summit upon the horizon, which called to him with a magical voice that he vowed some day to answer. Then to the left, in front, came a glimpse of a tender, sapphire sea between two rounded bluffs; the sign-post pointing thither said, "Trebarwith Strand." They swung on, and turned inland down a long, black, winding gorge, craggy with slaty rocks and great walls piled by the quarrymen long ago; ferns grew upon its precipitous sides and bushes of golden gorse. All the way a leaping brook made haste to race them, wagtails dropped and made little darting flights like black-and-white flashes of joy, and in every thicket a thrush or a robin was singing. And now the quarry walls towered above the road; and beyond on the left-hand side was a puffing of steam and the sound of machinery, which told that slate was actually being worked there. Peter closed his eyes as they rattled by.

Up a steep hill they reached an inn, which claims to be in Tintagel. Peter, like all newcomers, was deceived until Sir Everard called to tell him that this was Trewarmett. Riding on, they passed through a little hamlet with a glorious view of cliff and sea, and across the open down began to meet scattered houses, some common and bare—productions these of modern Cornish architecture, than which there is none uglier—some old, with twisted chimneys and tiny gardens bright with hollyhocks and fuchsias and Padstow's Pride. Away on the cliff was a huge castellated building with battlements. "What's that?" Peter exclaimed. "The great house over there?" "An hotel," said Sir Everard drily. "They call it the 'King Arthur's Castle.' Irving used to stay there." In a few more minutes they stopped at the head of a village street before a double-fronted house with mullioned windows. Cynthia came out of the porch, and Peter's heart leapt in greeting.

"Hullo, Daddy!" she cried, running down the path

towards them. "How do you do, Mr. Middleton? Daddy, Alan's come! He's got a bedroom at the Wharncliffe. His friends have gone on to Bude. They wouldn't dine with us after all."

"My son motored here from Penzance," Sir Everard informed Peter. "Where's little Phyllis, Polly?" He opened the wagonette door and descended.

"She's dressing for dinner already," returned Cynthia with the slightest tilt upward of the corners of her pretty mouth. Peter in the act of getting down heard a chuckle behind him, but on turning he saw Joyce perfectly demure. She jumped hurriedly to the ground in order to avoid taking his hand.

"Is she indeed? You go in, Middleton. I'll look after the luggage."

"Dinner is at seven," explained Cynthia, leading Peter into the house. "Will you have tea or whisky or something, in the meantime?"

Lady Bremner, who encountered them in the hall, overheard this comprehensive invitation. "You must certainly have a cup of tea," she said, shaking hands. "Rosemary, tea is in the drawing-room, waiting for Mr. Middleton. Will you pour it out for him, please? I've undertaken to advise Phyllis—my niece Phyllis Peto, whom you took in when you dined with us—as to an alteration in an evening frock, so you must excuse me, if you will." And, graciously smiling, she proceeded on her way upstairs.

Cornish air and the society of Joyce appeared to have demoralised quiet Cynthia. "Alan had whisky," she remarked doubtfully, looking at Peter.

Lady Bremner glanced over her shoulder, murmured, "Alan had been motoring, dear!" and disappeared.

"Alan had two large whacks." This from Joyce in a discreet aside. "And I know where the decanter is, if you want it, Rosie."

"Don't call me Rosie!" said Cynthia, almost with crossness, for she was oddly discomposed by her rebuke before the new guest. She led the way into the drawing-

room, adding, "It's bad enough for That One to call me so. I won't let you as well, Joyce!"

" 'That One' is my name for Cousin Phyllis. Don't you think it's a jolly name?" inquired Joyce, with a twinkle at Peter.

"I had not even found out she was called Peto, although I've taken her in to dinner. I don't know much about her yet," Peter replied cautiously.

"Phyllis doesn't need a surname," observed Joyce in a negligent tone.

Cynthia's face had cleared. "Shut up, kid," she said. "And forgive me for being angry just now."

Joyce looked at her gravely. "When we're alone you are frightfully decent to me and treat me like a girl of your own age, Cynthia. I'm rather shocked that you should call me 'kid' just to show off before Mr. Middleton." But seeing Cynthia turn scarlet she added a contrite, "I'm sorry, Cyn!" and ran out of the room with averted face.

"Now she'll weep!" compassionated Cynthia, rising, and then she seated herself again. "We're awfully good chums really, and now I've gone and made a beast of myself. Won't you have another cup of tea? Do let me give you another!"

"I wish you'd go to her," Peter jerked out, conscious as he uttered it that the phrase had an unfortunate double meaning. "I won't have any more tea, thank you."

Cynthia became radiant. "Oh, do you mind?" she said. "I can put it right if I can only catch her at once! Give me your keys and I'll set some one to work unpacking."

Peter rose too. "I'd rather do it myself," he said nervously, "if you don't mind pointing out my room."

Dinner added to the impression of a relaxed discipline and a holiday merriment in the family atmosphere. Cynthia, in a silvery gown, was laughing at very small jokes; Phyllis, in a daring frock of yellow, rendered innocuous by the discreet counsel of Lady Bremner, chattered loudly; and Joyce, in pale blue with a hair-ribbon of the same colour, was demure, nicely behaved,

and natural. For the first time in his life Peter forgot to be disconcerted by the proximity of ladies in evening dress, he forgot to be shy, he forgot to imitate the choice of dishes of his next-door neighbour, and took wine boldly, and joined modestly and cheerfully in the general conversation. Sir Everard glanced at him once or twice, and sent along the salted almonds, causing Peter to remember with a start of surprise that he had eaten almonds in Portman Square—did nothing then escape his host? The little byplay was observed by Cynthia, beaming upon the success of her new friend with soft laughter and merry words; and it gladdened her heart, for it meant that her father approved.

Everything was perfect that first evening of Peter's holiday, perfect the beauty and gentleness of the girl he was beginning to love, perfect the setting in which he found her. The Bremners had an environment as suitable to them as Portman Square, for the house they had taken was artistic in design and furnished harmoniously. It possessed a lawn of smooth green turf, and arched walks with rambler roses, and red valerian on the walls of the garden. An old figure-head, representing a helmed warrior, stood close by the porch. Not far away in the corner was a rockery of white quartz, with branching ferns, visible from Peter's seat at the dinner-table.

And the Bremners were serene and expectant of pleasure, a united family, forgetful that Love, the sower of discord, was in their midst. Alan, haggard from fasting and sorrow, had for the moment driven Helen Taliesin from his thoughts, Cynthia knew not the minds of distant Laurence and Shaun, and Peter she did not consider a possible lover. She had settled his place in her affections and intended to bind him there, a lifelong friend. So she was at ease and her parents likewise, for truth to say they understood not much that was passing before their eyes. Alan had been ill; their daughter was too young to marry. Alan had character and could be relied upon; Rosemary had romantic ideas, but she was a sensible girl as well as a pretty one, and after all Mr. James was a gentleman. He would know they

intended a better match for her. As for the attractive boy, let him replace Shaun James. He, most certainly, could not think of marriage.

Peter's excitement increased as the evening flew by. Rain drove him back when he went to the porch, but inside came discovery after discovery. Cynthia could sing and play; she was fascinating as she did each. Her voice was a light soprano, sweet and ringing; she sang ballads that her mother asked for, indifferent as to the choice. He decided she was not really musical; but how lovely her arms looked as she played, and no girl ever had so dear a face! Alan chaffed Phyllis out of her avowed intention of dancing, at which Sir Everard seemed relieved. Phyllis was inclined to hang round the men; she had a stern critic in Joyce, who kept watch on every one and was silent. And Alan himself was a good chap. What had made Peter misjudge the man in London? Why, he was as friendly as could be.

When it was time to light candles and go to bed, how interesting to note the various handshakes, from the firm grip of Alan and the steady clasp of his father to Cynthia's warm pressure, and the hot hand of Phyllis drooping from a curved wrist, and the dry fingers of Lady Bremner, and Joyce's shy little paw. Had he grasped Cynthia's hand too hard? Her eyes had been fearlessly gazing into his and suddenly a shiver had passed over their grey depths like a ruffle of wind on a calm sea-pool. . . . Peter was dreaming in his room, and now drew near to the window. Yes, her eyes were like sparkling clear sea-water . . . what a pity his hands were so strong! He did not mean to hurt her . . . but she was not elusive like water, she was steadfast.

There was a balcony outside, accessible if the window was flung wide-open. In a moment he had stepped into a gorgeous night of stars whose queen, a slender slip of a moon, rode naked across the deep blue firmament, shining high and conqueringly. The odour of the moist earth and of flowers ascended to his nostrils, the sea murmured along the strand, the beating was the beating of his heart. "Cynthia is my name," called the maiden

moon, but the constellations leaned from their thrones and whispered: "She is one of us! Your love is a Star dwelling amongst men. In her eyes is our light, to remind the forgetful of Space and of God." They swept down on Peter in a great rush of flying splendour and he woke from his reverie blinded, and the night breeze was lifting his hair.

"I will think of her as Star, if I may not speak the name," thought Peter, rubbing his eyes to bring back his wits again. He discovered the Greater Bear and traced the glimmering Pole Star, admired the sheen of the Milky Way, flung like a soft veil over the dusk-blue sky, and began in idleness to count the myriad sparks. What if the soul should pass a lifetime in each of these worlds in its pilgrim's course across eternity? Shaun James believed this; he said so in his books. But was it good? Did he glory in it when confronted by the open, or in a lamplit study? The aspect of the high dome of heaven seemed threatening to Peter, its spaciousness was empty, its fiery globes each an abode of lonely woe. Reaction gripped and tore him.

Memory and faith in Shaun, better still knowledge of his sweet, particular Star, supplied the true answer to the terrible doubt. Finer work, more wisdom, greater love! From world to world a progress, from life to life an ascent! Up the shining ladder of night leaped the imagination of the boy to find God, where his ardent soul would one day meet Him face to face.

VI

THE village street of Trevena, now called Tintagel, is wide and straight, and down it in the summer months go boys with clattering milk-pails, American ladies, motor-cars, flocks of sheep, sunburnt, long-stepping men visitors, girls with bare heads and ankles and suburban accents, girls in motor veils and cloaks, old women in sun-bonnets, the postman, dogs, cats, and occasional chickens, attractive family parties like the Bremners, Cornish 'tackers' and 'l'il maidens' on their way to school, and also flocks of crows and jackdaws, with sometimes, rarest of all, a red-beaked, red-legged chough. Brakes and wagonettes stop at the Wharncliffe Hotel at the top of the street, except those bound for the great caravanserai beloved of Irving, which is out of sight of the village and does not disturb its country peace.

Between nine and ten is the time when the resident visitors begin to make their appearance with towels and bathing-costumes, walking-sticks and bags of saffron buns; the luxurious carry novels and cushions, but few spades or pails are to be seen, as the nearest sands are over a mile away at Bossiney and there is only shingle at Tintagel Cove. It was 9.30 exactly when Cynthia ran in to the Wharncliffe to fetch Alan. Breakfast had been eaten, and various minor points in regard to the girls' attire dealt with by Lady Bremner in private, and Peter was already impatient to be off, not having learnt that ladies must not be hurried since there is usually a reason for their delays. On this occasion it was the contumacy of Phyllis that detained the party. She had twice been sent upstairs to put on stockings and had returned each time with a shorter skirt and a more open blouse; this perversity being displayed *after* she had obtained the

concession of wearing no hat! The third time, when she changed into a discreet blouse with transparent sleeves—but they are usual—and quite a lengthy skirt and pinned a smart white hat on her black ropes of hair, and came down still with pretty ankles bare, she won a victory. "You are nineteen, as you say, Phyllis," said Lady Bremner, "but it is my consolation that you look sixteen. You may do as you wish this once, and I'll talk it over with you in your room to-night." Which made the rebel somewhat ill at ease, filling her with uncomfortable forebodings.

Cynthia and Joyce were hatless as a result of their cousin's impudence, Lady Bremner having given general permission for the abandonment of headgear. Otherwise they were daintily seemly, like illustrations from the summer number of a ladies' paper, only prettier and in drawing. Alan was wearing white flannels, Peter too had blossomed out into his best. They made a handsome group of young people in front of the Wharncliffe in the morning sunshine, and deserved the admiration they won from good Mrs. Fry in the doorway opposite. Then Sir Everard appeared with his trout rod and creel and set off inland, after a rueful glance round the clear horizon; and finally Lady Bremner in grey under a pearl-tinted sunshade joined the others. "I think I'll saunter in the direction of Daddy's stream," she said. "I hope you'll take Mr. Middleton round the Island, Alan, when you go." Alan had a guide-book under his arm, concerning which mischievous signals had been exchanged between Joyce and Cynthia.

"We're not going there till this afternoon," Cynthia said.

"We're going everywhere this morning and we'll show him everything," Phyllis cried at the same moment.

"When you've done!" observed Alan. "Mother, you may reply on our doing our duty by King Arthur. Girls, if Mother is bound in the opposite direction, we'd better be making a start. Have one of mine, Middleton; Turkish on the left, Virginian on the right. Why on earth we don't keep a dog I can't imagine. Five

people without a terrier look utterly lonesome! Joyce, will you be our puppy? Frisk a little, dear, and wag your pigtail!"

"I haven't got a pigtail," said Joyce good-naturedly, "otherwise I would with pleasure. My locks are still unconfined, but I've grown out of twisting them into a tail, I can jolly well tell you!"

"Phyllis, my only love, you've forgotten your stockings. Fie, in the public street! Rosemary, you're looking very nice. You are a credit to your brother. Hullo, what's this? It's uncommonly fine!"

They were halfway down the street by this time, come to a halt before an ancient house with pointed gables and dormer windows, very quaint and beautiful, erected in the days when craftsmen were artists and builders were honoured by kings. It stood between the grey slate cottages, its neighbours, like a knight between peasants.

"Date, please, Joyce?" said Alan, consulting the guidebook. "Out with it like a good girl. Get it right first time."

"1912," returned Joyce promptly, amid laughter.

"All right, young woman! I'll keep my information to myself. You'll never know now when that splendid house was built. It's the old Post Office, and opposite is the new Post Office to prove that we are descended from apes."

"It is lovely," said Cynthia, wistfully.

"True, oh Princess! And you're quite right not to make a song about it. Phyllis, leave my Baedeker alone. The red paint comes off when small girls touch it. It's a misogynist."

They were walking on, and Phyllis had dropped behind with Peter, who was by no means willing; but Cynthia had kept close to Alan's side and Joyce was avoiding "That One," so he had no chance of escape.

"I'm not a small girl," cried indignant Phyllis, ceasing her attempts to prise the Baedeker from under Alan's arm and falling back a step to Peter.

"You behave like one and are clothed like one and

look like one''—as they turned to the left down a steep lane.

''I'm sure my skirt is long enough. Isn't it, Rosie? If Aunt Emmeline passed it I'm sure you needn't say anything, Alan! And if you are going to be horrid about my looking young, I shall let my hair down, so there!''

The minx followed up her words with deeds. She gave Peter her hat to hold and stood still, pretty elbows upflung and swift, white hands busy in the black masses of her hair detaching pins and preparing the coils for an effective descent. Then, with a toss of the head, her fingers leapt clear, and a long cataract rippled and rolled to below her waist. With a glance at Peter as much as to say, ''Look at that, now,'' she pushed away some loose strands that had fallen across her face, and, taking the hat, pinned it soberly to her belt; and off they started again. Peter set a good stiff pace. However willing he might have been in other circumstances to flirt with a maiden of a 'coming-on' disposition, he certainly did not desire to do so when the alternative was walking with Cynthia. He agreed with the comment of Joyce, overheard as they caught up the others at the foot of the hill, ''That One is a regular kitten to-day.'' He did not wish to play with kittens. Men who had fallen in love needed to be left alone with their thoughts, if they couldn't be with the right girl. His thoughts moved very swiftly as he strode down the slope. In six paces he settled the exact moment at which he had begun to be in love; it was when Cynthia appeared in the porch on his arrival. Also he had had time to speculate on the nature of his passion and to wonder why he had selected this particular young woman, out of the millions who crowd this earth, for an adoration that was different from anything he had felt before. Looking up and seeing her standing in front of him he ceased to wonder. She was tall, and white and cool as a lily. Deep down in his heart something said that he truly loved her. His surface mind was aware of a vivid, sparkling happiness induced by emotion, an ecstasy of joy, in which the

landscape danced and shimmered, the sky's fiery blue was a benison, the song of birds an invocation to thanksgiving, all on his behalf, all because this one girl existed and he was privileged to be near her. But underneath the roseate glow there was a true, small flame flickering in the soul of Peter Middleton; and he was beginning to be dimly conscious of his soul, and how the flame would cause him to become a participator in life instead of a spectator, as soon as it burnt high and clear. For this was the Love that is knowledge of God.

"The vicarage pigeon-cote is Norman," read out Alan. "It's that round massive structure over the wall. The Normans seem to have built fairly solidly."

"The roof is ingenious," said Peter.

"I like the holes all round so that each pigeon can have its own front door," cried Cynthia.

"And a slate for each to sit upon, outside. The Normans were evidently kind to animals. The Vicarage is a decent house, eh, Rose? Shall I enter the Church and have a try for it?"

"Alan isn't kind to kittens," said Phyllis to no one in particular, and under cover of the general applause she tucked her arm into his and led him on in triumph. "You know you can't resist me, old Alan!" she was overheard to say coaxingly, and over her shoulder came, "Not that I forgive you for calling me a kitten, Joyce dear!"

"Can I not resist you?" demanded Alan, but he allowed himself to be led away, nevertheless.

"That One was not born to be drowned," was Joyce's sententious comment. "No wonder she has not learned to swim."

"She's afraid to wet her hair. That's the real reason," said Cynthia, as they toiled together up the hill. Joyce plucked a blade of grass and began to chew it, with a side glance at her companion to see whether she might venture. "You may eat leaves or anything you like, so long as you don't tease me," Cynthia told her. "I don't feel like being teased to-day. I want a long, quiet chat with Alan about something particular, and I can't

get hold of him. Please, Mr. Middleton, will you help? If I tell my cousin she'll only hang round all the rest of the day and ask questions."

"Of course I will," consented Peter, sorely disappointed all the same.

"Take him to the island this afternoon," suggested Joyce.

"Can't. We're going to look for choughs' nests, the whole lot of us."

They came out on a green down, and the sound of the sea met them, ascending from three hundred feet below beyond the weather-beaten old church of St. Materiana, whose grey tower stands sentinel on the edge of Christendom. Tossing, foam-flecked billows were hurling themselves unceasingly against the great cliff, falling back again with a deep roar of disappointed wrath, and swirling and lashing themselves into a frenzy, and swooping forward once more to a new assault. The churchyard was not a quiet place. Alan and Phyllis had entered the gate, so the rest followed, and passing between the battered tombstones they wondered at the might of the winds that could force these heavy slabs of granite from the perpendicular. Alan waited for them and said, "If I had a grave here that I cared for, I'd come up on stormy nights and sit on the stone."

"You'd be blown away too!" screamed Phyllis, which caused Joyce to laugh unkindly.

"What has 'That One' done to you?" Peter had the curiosity to inquire, surprised at the anger in her mirth.

"I'm only a kid, but I hate seeing a girl go on like that," replied fierce young Joyce.

The interior of the church was dark and gloomy. They examined an ancient font, which received but cursory attention from the three girls, who were eager for sunlight and fresh air. Alan and Peter lingered a moment and then joined them, and in that second Peter found time to murmur, "Your sister wants a talk with you." "Right! Thanks!" said Alan.

Accordingly, outside they separated and Peter found himself once more alone with Phyllis and Joyce, the

centre of a continual fire of chaff, which crossed and re-crossed him without requiring intervention on his part to keep it alive. On the whole Phyllis gave as good as she got, for Joyce's past did not appear to be unimpeachable. "Who slid down the bannisters?" demanded Phyllis with triumphant iteration, causing Joyce, who had replaced her blade of grass by a sprig of wild thyme, to devour inches of the stalk in wrath and mortification. What there was to be ashamed of in the athletic feat Peter did not comprehend, until the chance word 'nightgown' and Joyce's blushes enlightened him. On the other hand it did not appear to be disputed that Phyllis had taken Joyce's silver-backed hair brush and concealed it with intent to annoy, which seemed a far worse crime to Peter.

Every now and then Phyllis raked him with an audacious glance of her black eyes, which were filled with fun as well as with provocation, appearing to ask, "Isn't this all ripping?" as well as, "Am I not a pretty girl?"; and so they went across the springy, green turf towards the verge of the precipice over which Alan and Cynthia apparently had walked, to judge from the suddenness of their disappearance. Silhouetted against the sky was the figure of an old man with a long white beard, showing very clear and gem-like on the azure background. He was trimming slates and talking to an enormous gull which stood a yard or so away from him, listening in respectful immobility.

"Good marnin'," he said, as the three approached and the great gull flapped lazily to a safer distance.

"Good morning to you," Peter replied. "I'm sorry we've frightened your gull."

"That don't matter. She'll come again, I rackon, for 'tes a hungry bird. Your friends are down under in the quarry, looking for Charlie Hamley, the bird-watcher."

"What's a bird-watcher?" demanded Phyllis.

"Man as a Lunnon Society pays wages to protect the nests of chaws and bluehawks agin strubbers, Miss!"

The old man was extraordinarily handsome, perched

there high above the sea, and his eyes were blue and clear and steady.

"May I feed the gull when it comes back?" pleaded Joyce. "Have you any more crumbs?"

The old man ceased work for the first time during the conversation, and slowly turning, gazed at her. "Yes," he said, after a moment, "yes, Missie. Come and sit by me."

Peter and Phyllis withdrew a little way and admired the tremendous sweep of coastline, wreathed in a sun-haze, stretching to distant Pentire Head, and listened to the thunder of the waves. Flights of rooks and jackdaws circled overhead, but they looked in vain for the red legs and red beak of the chough. A lark was singing behind them, and the scent of the wild thyme was blown across the down and the sun shone on their backs with summer heat. Phyllis, stretching herself luxuriously, lay back with her hands clasped behind her head and closed her eyes; but Peter leaned forward and listened to the old man, unwilling to lose an instant of his holiday in slumber.

" 'Tes what they calls a herring-gull," he was saying, "and that there stain on the side of her beak came to the gulls a long time agone.—It isn't there by chance, like. They do say, when the saint as named the church yonder was martyred, one of the gulls flapped around the soldiers' heads, screechin' and complainin' agin the wicked sin they was doin'. And a soldier caught 'un and nailed 'un by the beak upon the cross up over the saint's head. From that day to this they herring-gulls have had the red mark, but I can't speak as to the truth of the tale, for I'm a Methody mysel'. That's right, Missie. Throw the bread with your fingers, like. Don't stir more nor you can help. That's it! 'Tes a greedy fowl."

Alan and Cynthia reappeared above the brow of the precipice by the side of the old man, and the gull flew away. "Oh!" cried Joyce, disappointed.

"Sorry, old girl," said Alan. "We've settled with Hamley for three-thirty this afternoon. He says you need a steady head to get in sight of a chough's nest, and that puts Phyllis out of the party. Joyce, I daren't trust

you for the climbing. Be a man, and I'll take you out fishing one day instead. What about you, Middleton? Will you come?"

"I say, I'm no good on heights!" confessed Peter.

"No more am I," added Cynthia in a hurry.

Alan stared at her and forgot the manners of the Foreign Office so far as to whistle. "Since when?" he inquired. "My good Rose, remember Switzerland!"

"Well, I'm not going this afternoon," said Cynthia, obstinately, and she carried him on ahead, after a hasty farewell to the patriarch.

"If you see a bird containing the soul of King Arthur, that's a Cornish chough!" warned Alan over his shoulder; but to Cynthia he said rather coldly, "I don't understand you this morning, Sis. Middleton was not embarrassed, and the situation did not require saving."

"I was sorry for him. I did not want him to feel lonely. Anyhow, you need not have given me away, Alan!"

"Phyllis would have done that with an innuendo, the moment your back was turned. Really, you might have found a more plausible excuse! And he'll have Phyllis and Joyce with him in any case, so he can't be lonely. I should have liked you with me, Sis. In fact I was relying on you. Are you cross because I won't help you to become a governess?"

"I don't want to become a governess!" burst out Cynthia furiously. "You are hateful to me, Alan! Nor do I want to be a nurse; nor a shop-girl! I'm only asking you to use your influence with Daddy to get me a little independence, a chance to go my own way, and occasionally see my own friends in the house. It isn't much to ask. And you are a beast to me!"

"My good girl——"

"I'm not your good girl! I want to be my own good girl! I want to be good by myself, for a change. That's about what I do want!"

Alan looked at his watch. "Home, I suppose! It's getting on to lunch-time. What's wrong with your present life, Rose?"

"I'm sick of it. Look at the liberty a girl like Miss Taliesin has. She's doing something useful in the world; and what am I doing?"

"Do you share Miss Taliesin's views? Do you want a vote? Do you consider men unfit for such a position as she holds?"

"Don't you?"

"I've got a vote, thank you," said Alan. "And, no, I don't wish to see women in public life for a good many years to come. I'm afraid I think even Miss Taliesin's work might be better done by men."

"But don't you admire herself, her personality, what she's become through being independent and doing that work? I thought you did!"

Alan glanced at her, and his face hardened. "We're not discussing Helen Taliesin," he said, and he sighed after he had said it, which Cynthia was too agitated to notice.

"I shall jolly well ask her when she comes down whether she thinks I ought to be leading a life like this," she said. "I'm only a doll that Mother dresses up to wait on Daddy——"

"Stop!" commanded Alan. "That isn't the way to talk of them, and you know it, Sis! . . . It appears to me you have as much liberty as is good for you, my child. Dances without number, and that man, Shaun James, always about the house——"

"Oh, he isn't!" Cynthia contradicted in her turn. "The other day was the first time he'd dined with us for eight months!"

"Still, there he was. And here's this young chap Middleton, whose feelings you are so anxious to spare before they're hurt—remember he's quite unmarriageable, Sis, whatever James may be! Very few girls of your age are as well-dressed as you are, but you say that doesn't appeal to you. It would if you had to do without it! Miss Taliesin misses it, although you might not think so. You're got books, and you go to all the concerts you want and to the theatre pretty often, and there's the Bath Club coming on. I'm both-

ered if I see what it is you've got to grumble about, except that they don't give you an allowance. I've spoken about that to Dad, as you know, and Mother is against it. The money is spent on you all right, Sis. It's only the name of the thing after all!"

Cynthia spoke quietly. "I've no idea of the value of money and I want to learn; I've no idea of responsibility. I want to grow up. But if you won't help me, it's no good talking. I'd like you to know, though, Alan, that Mr. James does not want to marry me."

"Then he looks at you in an odd kind of a way sometimes!" retorted Alan.

"You must believe me! And Alan, you must admit he's a gentleman, even if you do dislike him so much."

"I don't dislike him particularly and I do admit he's a gentleman. My dear old Rose, let's cease to quarrel! It never does any good."

"I will, if you will," cried Cynthia, holding out her hand. "I suppose you never would see a girl's point of view, if she talked to you for a twelvemonth!"

VII

"I LIKE Peter Middleton," said Joyce to Cynthia, as they were washing their hands in the bathroom before lunch. "And as for That One she simply raves about him."

Cynthia felt a sudden glow of anger. "What am I irritated for?" she asked herself. "I must learn to put up with Phyllis." "Why talk about her?" she inquired aloud.

"*I* think he's just plain in a good-looking way, as a man ought to be, but That One worships his eyes and his nose and his tallness. Do you think his nose so very wonderful, Cyn?"

"It's a nice nose," returned Cynthia evasively. In secret she thought it most attractive, but she was not disposed to compete with Phyllis.

"That One is putting up her hair for lunch. She got in without Auntie seeing her. I do like you so much better than her, Cyn. She's a silly! Do you think I shall look nice when my time comes to put my hair up?"

"I like it down," said Cynthia, handing a towel.

"Thank you. Oh, but I'm looking forward and counting the months, for when it's up I'll be able to go out to Father and Mother in India, and there won't be any German to learn."

At this point Phyllis burst in and interrupted; and all three proceeded downstairs. "What were you shaking hands with Alan for?" asked Phyllis on the stairs, with one arm affectionately round Cynthia's waist and the other round Joyce's, which compelled a crab-like progress. Cynthia pretended not to hear.

Peter was feeling the effects of his self-sacrifice of the morning and was a trifle sad during lunch, although

he sustained a creditable conversation with Lady Bremner about the Church and the Vicarage. "And did you see the Island?" she concluded, Peter being overjoyed to hear Cynthia answer for him, "We're going there this afternoon, Mother. There was not time this morning, without being late for lunch."

"Good child!" smiled Lady Bremner, on a note of surprise.

"Did you have good sport, Sir?" Peter asked Sir Everard, who was silently carving a cold duck. As a rule Sir Everard liked this respectful form of address, but the question was unfortunate.

"I did not expect sport on such a bright day," he answered with indifference. "No, I got nothing. Only one bite."

Phyllis, who was observing the fall of the sensitive barometer of Peter's face, choked over a piece of bread, and Cynthia looked at her angrily.

After lunch, Lady Bremner retired to her room, and the three girls with Alan and Peter set forth again. Sir Everard was invited, but preferred *Blackwood's* and the shade. The sun was blazing down and the breeze had departed, leaving a mackerel sky; into the village street came the scent of new-mown hay as they strolled along, and this time they did not turn sharply to the left at the bend of the road, but took the narrow track in front of them into the valley leading to the sea.

"Do you bathe?" asked Peter of Alan, at the swing gate which both had advanced to open, with the consequence that they found themselves alone.

"Before breakfast; if it's smooth enough we'll have a boat. Rose, will you bathe to-morrow morning? Boat, if possible."

She regretfully shook her head. She would have bathed with Alan and Peter Middleton willingly, but Lady Bremner had said that she hoped she would not, and that was enough for obedient Cynthia. The other two had gone on in front, in apparent amity and alliance, which meant that Joyce was persuading Phyllis to let Cynthia show Mr. Middleton the Island by her-

self. "You had him all the morning," said cunning and good-natured Joyce. "And if she goes up and Alan clears off with the bird-man you and I might paddle."

Phyllis was attracted by the proposal. "Let's hire costumes from the old woman and bathe!" she exclaimed. "Auntie need never know."

"Not with you alone, in that undertow. Not if I know it," remarked Joyce, firmly. "I jolly well can't swim well enough for that!"

"Say 'well' a bit oftener! All right then. We'll paddle. Perhaps Alan will too, before he starts."

"He's got the guide-book and he'll rush round the island—you see! Besides, he might make a fuss. Alan's awfully particular, you know; and it *is* a bad beach for paddling, the waves pull the shingle over your feet so. But that's what I like. It's more exciting."

They were going down a narrow, unhedged lane, along a stream which ran sometimes on a level with it and sometimes dropped much deeper into the valley. On either hand rose a steep, grass-covered slope with here and there an outcrop of slaty rock amongst heather and wild thyme. The road curved to the right, and now blue sea came into view before them above white cottages: instinctively they quickened their pace. High on their left upon the cliff appeared the fragments of the old Keep of Tintagel Castle, piled in rugged and fantastic ruin against the sky-line. Now they were approaching the two cottages rapidly downhill. When they reached them, Cynthia entered the one with a carpet of smooth stones before the door to obtain the key of the Island from the dame who has conversed with all the celebrities of the world and heard them utter identical praises of Tintagel.

A few yards farther, and the party were looking down on a narrow cove, cliff-walled; its beach, which was composed of slaty shingle worn smooth by the sea, being attainable only by steps. Projecting from the water in the middle of the inlet was a rock, to which were connected the cables by means of which boats were lowered from or drawn up to a shelf of rock on the right. Sev-

eral newly-painted dinghies were lying there now, with another on which men in long boots and jerseys were busily working. The left side of the cove was formed by the towering precipice of the so-called "Island," which was in reality a peninsula, joined to the mainland by a crumbling isthmus of the narrowness of the track which crossed it and falling sheer to the sea from either brink. A path led up to this narrow place and was continued on the Island side by steps cut in the rock up the face of the precipice as far as a door in a battlemented wall that had once formed part of the fortifications and now protected the headland from the intrusions of relic-hunters with large sacks.

Peter had been hurried up there so quickly that he had not had time to be dizzy or to realise more than the wildness of the scene and its quality of exceptionalness which is the striking characteristic of Tintagel. But when Alan had entered, Cynthia would not follow. "We'll go in later," she announced, "without a guidebook, Alan." And when the door was closed and they were turning to descend again to the cove, Peter glanced above him up the towering cliff and below him down the stairway hewn from rock, that had only the frailest balustrade to shut it off from vacancy, to the narrow path across the isthmus; and he heard the pounding of waves upon the boulders at the foot of the precipice, and was attacked by vertigo. He managed to fight it down by the thought of Cynthia behind him. Looking in front of him, he saw the ruins of the Keep perched high across the gulf on the landward side; to the right were weird, slaty-dark cliffs with veins of grey quartz running through them: they loomed gigantic, three hundred feet above the breakers that assailed them with thundering blow after thundering blow, at whose tremendous impact the whole earth seemed to quiver. Somehow he got down to the isthmus. There, clinging to the wooden handrail and staring westward between Island cliff and mainland cliff across a shining, glittering sea to dim Pentire, he was again attacked by the sickening dizziness. This time Cynthia saw, and touched his arm, heal-

ing him. He turned to thank her. She smiled, and glanced away. In another moment he had mastered himself and was able to look down upon the cove.

The worst of the descent was over, and as they walked to the beach Peter had time to take a leisurely survey of the outer and inner battlemented walls and the few small ruins which were all that remained of the defences of Tintagel Castle upon the Island. They slope on green grass to the precipice edge; and underneath them, attainable at low water from the beach, passes a tunnel through the cliff, and the name of it is Merlin's Cave. Joyce ran ahead into it and the others followed, struck with wonder at the mystery of the place and awed by the sullen reverberating boom of water beyond in darkness. Cold drippings from the roof fell on their heads, the shingle descended in a sharp incline beneath their feet, then a corner was turned and light streamed across the cave, and another moment brought them to a high, arched entrance and sunshine and the tumbling waves.

"Isn't it glorious?" cried Peter, his hair ruffled by the breeze, his cap on the back of his head, a happy boy.

"Who stepped into that pool, besides me?" inquired Joyce.

"I did," said Cynthia. "And it *is* glorious. It's perfectly lovely."

"Top-hole!" agreed Phyllis. "I told you stockings were no good, Rosie, didn't I now?"

"Look at those whopping big gulls. I wonder which of them belongs to the old man," said Joyce, chewing a lock of hair in default of a blade of grass.

"We'd better go back and paddle, as we are wet," Cynthia recklessly suggested, and they entered the blackness again and passed into a place of dim shadow up the shingle slope to brightness and the beach of the cove.

"People bathe from Merlin's Cave," remarked Joyce, as she flung herself down and snatched at her shoes with business-like celerity. "And we've bathed from behind that rock there."

"Auntie wasn't a bit pleased," chimed in Phyllis, "and it's frightfully difficult to dry oneself, crouching down!"

"Mummy's quite right," Cynthia declared loyally. "The undertow is too much for Phyllis, as she can't swim." She had taken off her shoes and was drawing a stocking from her pretty toes. She tucked the stocking neatly into a shoe. Now both her feet were bare and she rose with a lithe movement and stepped cautiously to the edge of the water. Peter started as he found Phyllis's eyes fixed curiously upon him; conscious that he had been caught in the act of staring. It was impossible to deny it as he was stooping forward with one boot half unlaced and his fingers idle.

"It would have been all right, Cyn, if you hadn't swum so much," said Joyce from the advance place which shortness of skirts enabled her to take.

"Well, I don't often get a chance for a swim," Cynthia defended herself.

Phyllis accepted Peter's hand to help her to rise, and spoke to him in an odd voice, still gazing at him with round, surprised eyes, which looked as though they had suddenly understood something. "She swam out to that rock in the middle and dived from it, and of course Auntie wouldn't stand that, for there were men looking on."

"I never knew that!" cried Cynthia, vexed.

"*I* saw them!" said Phyllis.

And now Alan came hurrying down to the beach. "Glad you've Middleton to look after you," he commented. "That seems likely to be a damp amusement.—The Chapel's all right, and so are the graves and the kitchen chimney, but much of the rest is faked. You might date the lot from the twelfth century, and as for King Arthur . . ." He threw up his guide-book and caught it again.

"Oh, don't spoil King Arthur!" cried Joyce impatiently.

"Kid! Well, I'm off to meet Hamley."

"I'm not going to climb up to that island again,"

said Phyllis when Alan had disappeared, and she nodded at Joyce as she spoke. "Won't you show it to Peter, Rosie dear?"

"If you two will lie quietly on the beach and behave yourselves and go straight back to tea when the time comes!" replied Cynthia, too happy with her playmates, sun and air and water, to resent the diminutive. Peter was overjoyed. He had misjudged Phyllis, not having dared to hope for this, especially after the last few minutes!

They lay in a row on the warm shingle, waiting for their feet to dry in the sun. Those of Cynthia and Phyllis were equally white and finely shaped. Joyce's bare limbs were more sunburnt, for at her school the simple life was in force and young girls played summer games without stockings. "I'm jolly glad Helen Timbs got measles!" she sighed. "Else I couldn't have been here." She rolled over and picked up a piece of paper that was held down by a stone.

"That's not yours," said Phyllis, warningly.

"I know that, darling! Oh, it's a tract!"

"Those men who passed us as we came down must have left it," said Cynthia, getting ready to depart.

Phyllis gave a sudden scream. "Look!" she cried, pointing to a black head moving on the water at the entrance of the cove. It vanished.

"A seal," said Peter. "It was coming for the tract and you've frightened it away."

Cynthia was now shod and she rose to her feet, a tall, white figure with a crown of burnished hair, which the sun was turning to gold.

"Even a clean beach like this makes one's skirt horrid," she sighed. "I do like to be tidy. Come along, Mr. Middleton."

"Call him Peter!" implored Phyllis, teasingly.

Cynthia took no notice of her, continuing, "We shall have to be quick to get back by tea-time."

So Peter hastened to get ready, and presently they were climbing the steep path together, alone for the third time in their acquaintance. Peter had wondered what

he would say, had invented brilliant, glowing conversations which he never dared hope would take place, as he expected to be tongue-tied. And lo, everything was different from what he had foreseen, and he was talking freely with his divinity, as though they had known each other for years! As indeed they had, according to Cynthia's point of view, which included the childhood's meeting.

He uttered his thought aloud, while the girl was fitting the great key, which Alan had left behind with them, into the keyhole of the door set in the battlemented wall. Unconsciously he leaned away from the brink as he spoke, and stared at her with white face, for he was still suffering agonies from the dizzy ascent. "It's the first time we've been alone since I've been down," he said, "and we're good friends already!" He felt as though he ought to be disappointed, the quiet content which he experienced in her presence now that they were by themselves being far from his idea of a lover's passion. The glow of excitement was lacking, and not because of the mental strain of overcoming his vertigo. Rather it was replaced by this happy ease, for which Shaun would have told him to thank God, kneeling.

"I'm glad," replied Cynthia, frankly. "I want friends." She, like him, felt singularly free from care and as light-hearted as though something long looked forward to, even from childhood, had come at last bringing peace not readily to be understood; but in her case the emotion was calmer still. And it was unconscious; all she admitted to herself being, "I wish everybody were as nice and as easy to get on with as Mr. Middleton." Why he was so congenial she was too innocent, too unawakened, to attempt to analyse.

And now they were in the first enclosure, surrounded by ruined walls conspicuous for the height of their battlements and the skill with which the warrior-architect had utilised every inch of level ground and built his fortifications into the cliff. A circular Norman archway led out from the opposite side; by it was the remnant of the old kitchen, noticed by Alan.

"They're jolly fine, even if they weren't built in King Arthur's time!" said Peter. "And I daresay he had a castle here as well. Tell me why you need a friend, please. I'd like to be one to you."

Cynthia felt that she was going too fast with Mr. Middleton, and to salve her conscience deferred her explanation for several minutes. "I'll tell you about Tintagel first," she said. "Didn't you know Sir Lancelot fought giants on the causeway outside? By the way, I think it was very brave of you to come up here as you don't like heights. Mother has never been up yet. This part we are in was a prison in mediæval times. The old legends are much more exciting. When we were sitting on the beach couldn't you see King Arthur being washed up, a little baby, at the feet of the enchanters? That was the place where it happened, and the cave we went through is called Merlin's Cave. King Mark of Cornwall lived at Tintagel, and Tristram saw Iseult here. Shall we go on? It's only a little bit of a scramble to get to the top of the Island, where there's St. Juliot's Chapel with the old altar-stone remaining. The legend says Merlin was to be buried in it, but as they carried his body to the threshold it was snatched out of their hands, because he could not enter holy ground. So they had to bury him outside after all."

During the walk thither Peter was silent, though without confusion: he could not be embarrassed in the presence of this girl. She was too splendid, too real. The simplest things she said had a kind of magic in them, or was it just the sweetness of her girlhood, and her freedom from self-consciousness, and the friendly charm of her eyes? Love or no love, he and she were born to be comrades.

They examined the chapel; and walking on the highest ridge of the Island came to the ancient graveyard, whose stones are barely visible above the soil. On the left was the Pinnacle Rock, and, close by, King Arthur's Seat, high above the waves, and the hollows known as his Cups and Saucers and his Footprint; but all of these were near the edge of a sheer precipice and Cynthia

forgot them for her companion's sake. She showed him the spring that gave fresh water to the garrison—discoverable by the rich emerald green of the grass around it; and also the curious, low cave, roofed by a mighty slab of rock which tradition says was placed there by Merlin, who closed the opening by a spell so that his prisoner could gaze everlastingly into the free air. The confined spirit might be still suffering his awful punishment, so they approached the narrow entrance with a thrill, speedily calmed by the sight of a *Daily Mail* which desecrated the interior. Peter threw this over the cliff.

Then they seated themselves as near to the brink as Peter could get in comfort, surrounded by the tiny star-like flowers of the stonecrop growing in and out of the crevices of the rock; and looked for choughs among the ravens that chattered angrily about their heads; and listened to the ceaseless complaining of the breakers as it rose to them from far below. The sea was a slaty blue, the breeze was dropping, and long lines of spindrift made white streaks upon the plain of water. On their left the cliffs stretched unbroken to the headland of Pentire off which was the rocky islet called The Mouls. The light shone white on houses halfway thither, marking the position of Port Isaac, whose harbour was concealed from view. And on their right hand were higher, grimmer precipices, from Willapark and Trevalga Cliffs to Meachard Rock and Firebeacon Point by Beeny, crowding upon each other to the misty outline of far-off Hartland. The view was of compelling grandeur.

"There's nowhere else like this in Cornwall," murmured Cynthia, under the spell.

And Peter also spoke beneath his breath. "Why do you need a friend?" he asked, looking from the ocean to the girl's sea-grey eyes, which were deep and thoughtful. "She is my star," he heard a voice whisper in his heart, and it seemed to him he said the words aloud, but she neither moved nor did her countenance change.

"Because I'm lonely, I suppose. I want to do things. You don't know what it is to be a girl."

"I'm not free either," answered Peter, slowly. "I can sympathise."

She turned her bright gaze to his; full of impulsive gratitude. A tender smile rose to her lips. Their delicious curves quivered and they opened. "I thought you would!" she cried. "Shaun has always been free, and though he understands he hasn't real sympathy. He blames me in his heart for not standing up to Mother, but how can I? You see how difficult it is. Mummy is right in nearly everything, and if I could make a choice I'd often do exactly what she chooses for me, which makes it all the harder to fight for the other things. She knows I do willingly what she asks, and she doesn't realise how I hate to be taken for granted. It isn't that she doesn't trust me! It's only that she's accustomed to arrange for me as well as herself. I've fought to be allowed to keep Shaun, and she's been sweet in giving way to me there. But it's the little things! I don't want to be independent half so much as to *feel* independent." She leant back again.

"It's partly like that with me," said Peter. "The system is wrong."

"That's it! Not the people at all."

"I hate to sound discouraging, but systems are horribly difficult to alter, far worse than individuals. That's why I'm a Conservative and not a Socialist, because if the State did everything it would be all System."

"I never thought of that!" said Cynthia. "Of course it would."

"I'll ask you to forgive me, if I'm impertinent. I'm trying to say what I think. It seems to me that in a way it's rough on a girl to be good-looking. A girl who's pretty is never free, if she's carefully brought up; and supposing she isn't she gets a kind of liberty certainly, but every man she meets is trying to put an end to it."

"How did you learn all these things?" asked Cynthia, curiously.

"I don't know," said Peter, flushing.

"And that would mean that if I entered a profession or was able to do what I liked I should be bothered by men making love to me?"

"You wouldn't have any peace," Peter stated with conviction.

"I don't want to sound a conceited cat," said Cynthia, laughing, "but I'm already worried that way at present!"

"I'm sure you are, but don't you see? The freer you were, the more opportunity there'd be for men to approach you, and you'd have to learn to guard against them and keep them off, and that must be a beastly sort of knowledge for a girl."

"You think I should occupy all the spare time I'd gained, just in keeping the men I didn't like at a distance? It's a flattering suggestion, Mr. Middleton."

"I mean it," said Peter, doggedly. "It's not all fun for a girl who's working side by side with men, and claiming equality with them, to be tremendously good to look at."

"Isn't the disadvantage the same in society?"

"Not quite. When a girl is sheltered men have to make love in a certain way. That cuts out the wrong 'uns."

"I wonder!" said Cynthia. "Queer people have proposed to me. Still I do understand, and it's very, very nice of you to be so frank. Also I agree with most that you've said. Tell me what sort of a man would you think sets a girl who's been a prisoner free when he marries her?"

"I suppose every man would think he does."

Something in his voice must have startled her, for she remained a long time silent. Peter could see her profile and some strands of waving hair. He thought it a face intended to be strong as well as beautiful. There was indecision in the parted lips, but not weakness. Then her charm overcame him again, and he could only adore.

She stirred and he looked away. "Would Mr. James?" she asked.

Peter hesitated. "Really, I hardly know him. I've only met him once."

"You've read his books, and thought about him since you saw him. Please, Mr. Middleton!"

"I believe he'd make a splendid husband," said Peter; then, choosing the greater risk of honesty with a third member of the Bremner family, "but his wife would have to put him first in everything. She might like to," doubtfully.

Cynthia sat up with impulsive, girlish grace. She held out her hand in greeting. "It was horrid of me to ask you," she said, "and I apologise. You must have hated having to criticise him. Let's be friends! Proper friends, I mean; intimate friends, if I can help you! You are kind to answer my questions so straight-forwardly!"

Peter seized her warm hand. She returned his grip with a steady, strong pressure. His heart had sunk at the word 'friend,' but an extraordinary feeling of light-hearted joy came at her touch. "I'll be anything you like!" he answered, fervently.

She let go his hand and sprang to her feet. "It's time to be moving," she said, smiling a little. "All good moments come to an end." She was amused at the sense of independence and ease and space which she felt always in the presence of this new acquaintance. "Was 'freedom' equivalent to being with Peter Middleton?" she idly asked herself, and a horrified exclamation from him cut short a train of thought which might have caused her to draw back.

"Do you know it's five o'clock?" he cried.

"Five o'clock!" repeated Cynthia. The position was serious. It was impossible to get back to the house in time for tea. She hastily decided to take tea at one of the cottages above the cove, and keep watch for a possible search-party. That was better than hurrying home like culprits; but, oh, to belong to a family where girls were permitted to break rules!

"Have tea with me at the Cove." The suggestion came as an echo to her thoughts, and the sunlight was

on his face, transfiguring it, and his voice was trembling with eagerness.

"Thank you very much," she said.

. . . . . .

That night Peter retained a clear recollection of the fantastic contours of the cliffs and rocks and ruins on the landward side, seen from the summit of the Island, of their wild beauty, of the shelving veins of quartz across the precipices, and the circling seabirds, and the steep paths running to and fro like stretched-out ribbon; and he remembered the descent into the gulf, down endless stone steps, with a white skirt fluttering in front; but he could not be clear as to all they had talked about, because he had had to restrain his lips from uttering words of passion which gathered unbidden in his heart and surged upward like a flood. Mostly it was of books that they had spoken, and she had laughed her merry, childlike laughter, which was musical as the mirth of a rippling brook. So much he knew. And he remembered the tiny, oak-raftered parlour in which they had eaten and drunk together as naturally as though they were always to enjoy the same sweet intercourse. The walk up the combe was vivid in his mind. He could hear the creak of the swinging gate before they came to the village, and the sound of Sir Everard's voice in front speaking to Alan and his words of greeting as they came into sight. "Hullo, Polly, here you are, safe and sound. Your Mother has been anxious," and Cynthia's low-toned reply, "I'm sorry, Daddy." Dear Cynthia, his friend. Dinner had passed gaily, and she had played and sung. Her lovely arms had gleamed white in the soft candle-light on the piano. Her hair had shone with a rich glow. Her frock had been simple and wonderful. And although she knew—she had whispered it to him—that her mother was coming to her room to scold her, with what courage she had smiled when she said good-night. The stars were dancing again in her eyes. She was a Star herself, his friend . . . his love . . . his darling Cynthia. Sweet Cynthia! Darling, darling, darling . . .!

And this was the end of Peter's second day of freedom.

VIII

Lady Bremner had not been unkind. She was disarmed by Peter's skilful apologies which drew the blame on himself, and by the sudden propriety of Phyllis, whose dinner-gown was described by Joyce—with pardonable exaggeration—as 'nun-like.' Or was it the holy aspect of the wearer that produced the effect? And Phyllis had listened meekly to her lecture, for she was full of the secret she had discovered and of her own self-sacrifice. What a romance! Just fancy Peter falling in love with her own sweet Rosie! For he was in love, of that she felt certain, and was only afraid lest young Joyce had noticed it as well. She meant to be a friend to Peter—he had such nice broad shoulders. It would be a Platonic affection, on the loftiest plane of sentiment, and already she felt a better and a wiser girl.

Alas for good resolutions, which so often die at the birth of their splendid children, deeds! Phyllis's were short-lived. The very next day, after puzzling Peter by her singular behaviour all the morning, as soon as she was left alone with him in the afternoon she joined the pianola attachment to the piano, hastily assured herself that Lady Bremner was lying down, tore into her bedroom, which was on the same floor as the drawing-room across the corridor, to change into an evening frock, and was back in a flash to dance to him. What is more, she compelled him to abandon his attitude of resignation and admire her deviltry and somewhat acrobatic skill. Satisfied by his simple words of praise, she was good for two whole days after. Then coming down early to dinner and finding him by himself in the room, she got him to fasten a bracelet round her slim wrist and practically dared him to kiss her. Brilliantly pretty girl

though she was, Peter refrained, and, to her credit be it said, Phyllis bore him not the slightest malice. On the contrary, she elevated him to a loftier throne in her fancy, comparing him with King Arthur to that monarch's discredit, and herself with Vivien! After this she played around him with perpetual demands of friendship about as difficult to satisfy as those of a Persian kitten would be.

Her use of his Christian name was persistent enough to secure before long official authorisation from Lady Bremner. "It is difficult for you young people to keep up formalities when you are constantly together. I'm sure Rosemary would not mind your addressing her by her first name, Peter. My husband and your father were such close friends that I cannot think of you as a stranger." Peter had the grace to wonder what his hostess would think of him if she knew his worship of her daughter and how he trembled with happiness at the idea of being on familiar terms with her. Lady Bremner was invariably nice to him; indeed this sprang from a genuine liking. She was more than ever determined that he should replace Shaun James and deliberately threw him and Cynthia together, which was the easier because Phyllis and Joyce now went together to Trebarwith Strand before lunch to bathe. Peter had already swum at daybreak with Alan, when the dew was sparkling on the grass in the pearly morning sunshine and the fresh sea breeze was rising, and Cynthia preferred a ramble with him to bathing with the others under the chaperonage of her mother, who would probably insist on a tent being taken were she to be of the party. Cynthia felt she could not bear the idea of a stuffy tent shared with restless Phyllis and chaffing Joyce. She longed to bathe from a boat far out at sea, as she had been allowed to do before she put her hair up.

Sir Everard and Alan fished most of the time, and on the morning that Lady Bremner came to her decision about Christian names Peter was asked to accompany them. His host, shocked to learn at dinner the night before that Peter had never caught a trout, had resolved

to make good this omission in his education. He proved a stern taskmaster, and his pupil—whose thoughts were at Trebarwith whither Cynthia had escorted her mother—did not do him much credit. True, Peter landed the only catch of the day, quite two inches long, but as he returned it to the stream with unnecessary secrecy Sir Everard was never aware of this triumph.

The same afternoon Miss Taliesin arrived, and the addition of so strong a personality as hers proved to be on closer acquaintance could not fail to affect them all; Alan, with whom she spent the greatest portion of time, being the least altered. He remained smooth and unapproachable, and came back from long walks with the woman he was supposed to love, only a shade whiter than he set out. Cynthia was at a loss to understand either of them, or the attitude of her parents. Her mother went out of her way to be nice to Miss Taliesin and treated her with a respect and affection which almost suggested she was to become one of the family. But Daddy was equally affectionate. Surely he would not approve of Alan making such a match! The wife of a Foreign Office clerk in Holloway Gaol, or supporting Miss Kenney on the platform at a public meeting, would place her husband in a difficult position. Cynthia herself believed her brother rather a heartless person, and doubted whether he cared sufficiently for Miss Taliesin to marry her. And could a Suffragette love? Joyce out of her vast experience would have hotly contended the thing was impossible; but Cynthia was woman enough to know that Miss Taliesin was extremely fond of her brother. Indeed she said so herself, though in a way to make it clear she did not mean to be questioned. Altogether the condition of affairs was mysterious.

Peter observed that Cynthia was getting together a good deal of information regarding the work, other than political, which women do nowadays; but he did not connect this with their talk on the Island, and Cynthia did not return to the subject with him. It was settled he was to call her Cynthia, not Rosemary, which Lady Bremner welcomed as a blow to the supremacy of Shaun

James who had previously been the only user of the name. Cynthia, however, had no thought of possible rivalry. Shaun was still her first and dearest friend, the cleverest man in the world. Peter was the most charming boy she had ever met, who might in the course of time become a friend of Shaun's standing. Her mind and emotions were bewildered by the complexity of the opposing influences which were being brought to bear. Peter Middleton was making love to her without either of them being aware of it. Shaun was making love to her against his own will and in a very insidious way. She liked him sufficiently well to suppose that if he tried hard he might persuade her against her better judgment, and was resolute in believing he would not try. On the other hand, Laurence had announced his intention of marrying her, and he had the peculiar knack of making her do what she did not want to do; even, on occasion, things she thought wrong. No amount of self-analysis revealed the origin of this power, and in secret she was a trifle afraid of him. She detested flirting of all things in the world; and twice he had succeeded in making her flirt. She was too innocent. Mothers of the type and class of Lady Bremner bring up their daughters almost entirely with a view to matrimony—and neglect the most important point of all. They do not tell them what marriage means. Cynthia had no idea that the difference between being the wife of Shaun or Laurence would be a very great matter, so long as she married the one she loved. And at present she loved neither, at least she thought not. If she did, love was a fearful disappointment!

She felt more disposed to make an attempt to earn her own living than to marry, although both were possible means of obtaining the freedom that was a necessity of her soul. The situation of Peter had made little impression upon her as yet and she honestly thought him freer than herself. The simplest deductions are often the most difficult to make and one does not need to be blind not to see what is immediately before one's eyes; otherwise there would be no such thing as learning by bitter

experience and the young would be rulers of the world.

How was she to earn it, that was the problem? As an actress? Mummy would be horrified at the idea. As a governess, then? No. Cynthia Bremner had seen too many governesses to envy them. As an inspector of factories, like Helen Taliesin? She possessed no qualifications for such skilled and useful work. Brought face to face with the facts she realised that she was not suitable for any kind of employment. It came as a shock to Cynthia, who asked herself next what happened to girls like her if their parents suddenly lost their money and died, and no one appeared to help them. Fortunately for her peace of mind she did not know the answer.

Laurence Man had arrived at the King Arthur's Castle Hotel at a propitious moment, as his luck generally enabled him to do. He was invited by messenger to a picnic at the Ladies' Window Rock with the 'young people' on the following day. Peter, issuing from happy dreams, sorrowed because his lady did not play or sing that evening. He thought 'her candid front was lined by care' and looked so woebegone that Joyce, coming unconcernedly to have her hair-ribbon tied—she liked to make use of him—murmured a fervent, "Buck up, Peter. Don't be a silly!" She knew That One would imitate him, and two faces of such a length would attract unwelcome comment from Alan. Joyce did not care to have anyone but herself tease Peter. She was an affectionate child in spite of her chaffing ways.

IX

CYNTHIA awoke to see the sunshine streaming through her blinds. She was disappointed in the weather. So was the lady's maid, Marie, who disliked carrying towels and bathing costumes. No one else was, not even Sir Everard, who was a fisherman but no mere murderer of fish; not even Peter, although he knew Laurence would dominate the picnic. He hoped for moments alone with Cynthia, counting on the help of Joyce with whom he had now a first-rate silent understanding; in any event he would have his lady constantly in sight, performing the miraculous feats of walking, speaking, and smiling. Lady Bremner, who expected most from the day, had to be careful to forget all that she would suffer by Laurence's success in order to avoid weakening her resolution. Having done it, she visited the children's bedrooms to request them to wear their most becoming frocks, deceiving none by the ruse of adorning all. "Why does she bother about us?" asked Phyllis, arriving in Joyce's room in an elaborate dressing-jacket of transparent lace, which she wanted to have admired. "Don't be such an ass," answered the younger girl crossly. "You know as well as I do."

Phyllis flung out slender, rounded arms, from which the Mechlin fell back in a way that drew attention to their beauties as well as its own, and pretended to yawn. "Seen this lace of mine?" she fished.

Joyce did not trouble to look. "I'm not a man," she said, witheringly. "You needn't bother, Phyl. I know you've got a thundering lot of hair, but I don't want to see you sit upon it this morning, thank you. And Cyn has more anyway, and hers has golden lights in it which is a jolly sight better than your tarry stuff. Clear out, and let me dress in peace!"

Phyllis using the high top rail of the end of the bed as a horizontal bar lifted herself to a sitting posture with

legs outstretched in front of her. "You're a cheeky kid!" she observed. "Now what d'you bet I won't throw a somersault backwards on to the mattress?"

"Anyone could fall back on a bed," jeered Joyce.

"I'm not talking of a fall back. I mean a proper somersault coming down on my feet."

Joyce was intrigued. She came and stood in front of the carefully balancing Phyllis. "I bet you can't!" she said at last, with her head on one side. "And you daren't try."

"What will you bet?" persisted Phyllis, and she jeopardised her chance of a big wager by clasping her hands behind her neck, which was skilful. "Will you leave me alone with Peter against my promising to take Mr. Man from Rosie?"

Joyce's eyes narrowed as she deliberated, and Phyllis dropped her hands and took hold of the rail in readiness.

"Why should you want to bother Peter?" protested Joyce. "You know he likes Cyn better, and you're always talking about friendship! Why don't you be a silly old Suffragette again as you used to be, and leave men alone?"

Phyllis tossed back her black mane and tightened her grip. "Yes or no, and be quick about it!" she cried. "I'm not going to stay up here all day! You don't believe I can do the somersault, so why be in a funk?"

"You're only boasting, and it's yes!" decided Joyce. A whirl of white limbs and garments answered the challenge, and Phyllis was on the quilt, knees bent, saving herself with both hands from falling forward. She sprang upright and shook her hair from her eyes.

"There!" said the victor, triumphantly, leaping to the floor, "I'll teach you to despise my gym, Miss Joyce! You don't seem to understand how good I am at gym!" And Joyce was aghast. In silence she watched Phyllis pursue a slipper which had flown into a far corner of the room, turn it right way up, and insert her little bare foot. "I'll let Rosie see me with him," threatened That One as she withdrew in high feather to her own apartment; and when she was gone Joyce

threw herself on the bed in despair and burst into tears.

. . . . .

Alan and Miss Taliesin had agreed to guide them as far as Willapark before departing on an expedition of their own; Alan was to point out the breeding-place of the choughs. The party found Laurence in the lounge of the 'King Arthur's Castle,' looking very much at home there. He brightened on catching sight of Cynthia and, coming forward, greeted all warmly, not excepting surprised Peter, who had not looked for cordiality. Peter, however, soon became an onlooker.

The first thing to strike him was their exceptional collective good looks. Laurence's handsome countenance was almost saintly with the sunlight upon it; Alan was gentlemanly in features and bearing; Cynthia was a lovely girl, who just fell short of perfect beauty (which Peter could not and never did admit); little Phyllis's black and white and rose made her equally striking at first sight, and there was no flaw in her brilliant, conventional prettiness; Joyce had an odd, attractive face; and Miss Taliesin—well, it must be admitted she was hopelessly plain. He took a second glance round the circle. Laurence was in white flannels, Alan in an old golfing suit; the girls, as usual, all in white—Cynthia with gold belt and brown shoes and stockings, Phyllis with a scarlet tie and belt, bare ankles and white shoes, and Joyce with a pink ribbon in her hair, a tie to match, bare legs and grey sand-shoes; Lady Bremner having given in to Phyllis's persistent disobedience in the matter of stockings had had to let the younger girl leave them off also. Cynthia's hat was a Panama. Phyllis wore a floppy muslin affair with a big scarlet bow in front, and Joyce had a straw hat with her school colours. Miss Taliesin was dressed in green; on her head was a very ugly cloth cap. She looked thirty-five, Peter thought; Cynthia, about twenty; Phyllis, seventeen; and Joyce, fourteen—her real age. His other guesses went astray, as Miss Taliesin was only twenty-seven; Phyllis being nineteen, and Cynthia more than twenty-one. It struck him that of them all Laurence and 'That One' seemed

most in place in the lounge of the hotel. Although Miss Taliesin was of a type often to be met travelling, she did not look appropriate, and the others needed the severer and finer background of a private house to do them full justice.

On hearing that Marie had been sent to Bossiney to await them with bathing gear, Laurence excused himself, and returned with his; and then they started, Joyce lagging behind with Peter. The child's conscience was teasing her as to the consequences of her bet lost to Phyllis. She had become attached to Peter, who was always kind and interested, and treated her as a civilised being. Schoolgirls grow tired of being chaffed, and they do not love being condescended to any more than does the average grown-up person. Joyce had brains and humour. She did not worship the male sex, and she found men, although pre-eminent in the activities of cricket and hockey, dull of understanding where girls and women were concerned. She idolised her games-mistress who combined wisdom with prowess; but she doubted whether C. B. Fry could sympathise with the workings of her mind or perceive the really funny things that constantly happened before her eyes. Peter did sometimes see them, not always by any means, still a great deal oftener than any man except the terrible Shaun James, who had only to look at her to read her inmost thoughts. Few feminine beings like to be understood by men, and young girls are often particularly shy in this respect. Joyce feared Shaun as she did no one else, although she had nothing in the world to conceal or be ashamed of.

She was as sweet to Peter as she knew how, and all the way up the breathless ascent to the headland of Willapark she was telling him about her beloved school, and her wonderful mistresses surpassing those of any other girl as pearls do bricks; and how the girls were divided for games, not according to forms but into sections regulated by age and strength; namely, First and Second Greeks, First and Second Trojans, Big Cats and Little Cats, Big Mice and Little Mice; and of the fright-

ful excitement when, as occasionally happened, the First Trojans challenged the First Greeks and beat them. She herself had just ceased to be a Big Cat and had entered the ranks of the Second Trojans. Had Peter noticed her colours, pink and white? Cyn wasn't at school long enough to get higher than the First Trojans, but she was frightfully good at games then. Did Peter like hockey? Joyce loved it, and cricket next, and then swimming. That One had been at a stupid school where there wasn't a swimming-bath and there weren't enough of them to play games properly, so they golfed and did a lot of gym, and thought a heap of themselves. She didn't like stuck-up girls, did Peter? Did he see those two birds up high, big ones? . . . "No, there, Peter, like aeroplanes!"

"See the buzzards?" shouted Alan from in front.

Now they reached the summit of the enormous headland, and on Phyllis turning to wave a hand to them Joyce became moody and found no more to say. Peter talked to her about cricket until they came to the Tye Rock cliff, where the rest were waiting. Here a general consultation took place. While Alan was marshalling his forces, Cynthia told Joyce, quietly, "That One is full of yearnings, to-day," to which the child replied with grimness, "That One will grow out of them!"

"Attention, please," said Alan. "It's a scramble on turf down the slope as far as you can see, and then a stiff climb down the rocks to the level of the water, which isn't a great distance further. The nest is in the roof of a cave, and you have to get below it to see. Rose, you've got to come, I know *you're* all right. Joyce, I'll let you try, but you must turn back if you get frightened."

"Which I shan't!" said Joyce, promptly.

"I'll tuck you under my arm and carry you, if you interrupt! Miss Taliesin will make the attempt to get down, Peter I hope won't; and if we put up the birds he may get a better view of them than we do. Man, are you coming?"

"Most emphatically!" replied Laurence, looking at Cynthia.

"You needn't come on Sissy's account," said Alan. "She's a first-class mountaineer. Still, delighted to have you with us, of course. Phyllis, you darling girl, your little featherhead is easily turned, I believe?"

Joyce was on the point of bursting in with a denial, but Phyllis silenced her by a glance. "Remember your promise!" said the quick wave of her hand. "Leave me with Peter!" commanded the black eyes. "Do!" formed the scarlet lips, beseechingly.

"You told me so, when it was a question of my coming on the last occasion," said Phyllis, demurely. "I think I'd better stay up here, please!"

"All right," said Alan. "Take my hand, Joyce."

So Peter and Phyllis lay on the grass to watch. Halfway down the steep declivity Miss Taliesin was seen to be in difficulties, and Alan left Joyce to go by herself and went and helped her. Cynthia was ahead, balancing with careless ease and descending swiftly. Laurence's pursuit looked dangerous from above, and he stumbled twice. At the place where the precipitous rock began Miss Taliesin found a seat, and remained in sight after the others had disappeared downwards one by one.

"Wouldn't you have thought I had a steady head?" inquired Phyllis, moving nearer so that he might have an opportunity of examining it.

Peter sighed. "I'm sure you're a daring climber," he said.

"I am," said Phyllis. "I don't fear anything."

"You're tactful to-day, Phyllis!"

She shook her head at him reproachfully, quite unabashed. "You don't understand me a bit yet, Peter."

"I'm tired of hearing you say that," muttered Peter.

"What are you growling about, like a big bear? Of course I wasn't jeering at you. Aren't we Friends? I want to consult you about something, Peter."

"Well, what?"

"Please be nice. Tell me the honest, truthful truth. Do you think I'm a selfish girl?"

"I don't know enough about you to judge."

"Oh, you *do!* You might tell me, Peter."

He was aroused to indignation. "Look here, Phyllis. If I told you, it would only mean you'd argue with me for half an hour and end up by swearing I didn't understand you a bit. What's the use?"

Vivien wriggled a little closer to King Arthur and told him not to be a cross boy. Could he look at her and continue ill-humoured? No one else could! (An internal reservation was made as to sex.) When people looked into her eyes they called her bewitching, or tantalising or fetching, or pretty or lovely, but never did they remain out of temper!

"I can," said Peter, firmly.

"I dare you!" cried the minx.

Long afterwards Peter asked Shaun James what he ought to have done in this emergency. "Kiss her and talk to her about her soul," replied the expert.—"But she hasn't got one."—"That's a trifle."—"Besides, I don't want to kiss miscellaneous girls," objected Peter. . . .

"All right," he said in a ridiculously portentous voice, and turning, faced her squarely. She was lying with her head supported on her hands. Her wide-open mischievous eyes deepened to innocence under his gaze and became roguish again as her lips parted and she smiled. Peter smiled, too. He could not help himself.

"Thank you," he said, "for restoring my good humour."

"I've won!" sparkled Phyllis, and then invitingly, "Aren't you going to, Peter? Won't you?"

She was fascinating, but Peter was armed. He shook his head.

"I don't understand you a bit," he teased, thinking himself out of reach. Phyllis, however, like the Vivien she had compared herself to, could writhe swiftly as a snake. She did so now and kissed Peter, entirely taken by surprise, fairly on the left cheek.

"You shouldn't have dared me!" she said, sitting up, flushed and rather ashamed. She had known that the others were mounting the slope, and was now calling herself, most justifiably, a cat of cats.

"I got part of the way down the cliff; didn't I, Alan?" called Joyce in high excitement, as the toilers approached the top. She had evidently observed nothing, so that was one accounted for. Cynthia had a bright colour, for which the climbing might be responsible. She spoke to Peter. "The cave is very big, with an entrance like the nave of a cathedral. And the sea comes into it and makes a whispering sound. We saw the nest quite plainly. How would you describe it, Alan?"

"A good, symmetrical nest."

"It is up high, and the mother bird flew out. We saw her red legs and beak, so there could not be any mistake. Did you see her, Phyllis?"

"No," said Phyllis, with hanging head, for she felt her cheeks burning. One of Peter's was equally hot; and he guessed for the first time what a girl's sensations must be when the wrong man unexpectedly snatches a kiss. He pitied the girl.

"I'd sooner face an angry meeting than go down that slope again," exclaimed Miss Taliesin, as soon as she was safely over the edge.

Alan's voice was different when he spoke to her. "You aren't called upon to do either unless you wish," he said. Laurence, stooping for his towel, turned his head, but Miss Taliesin did not answer.

Then they marched to Bossiney Haven, where they met Marie bearing towels, accompanied by a boy who staggered under the luncheon basket. "Poor kid!" said Cynthia, and tipped him twice as much as was necessary. On the western side of the cove stands the Elephant Rock; Joyce and Phyllis bathed from behind the trunk of the elephant where there is a natural dressing-room. Laurence found another and joined them, but Miss Taliesin changed her mind and remained with Peter and Cynthia, keeping alive the conversation, as she was fated to do whenever the former was present. They sat on the beach watching, and Marie stood by the water's edge with cloaks and kept a satiric eye on Miss Phyllis, whom she suspected as only a cynical Frenchwoman can suspect. If Phyllis could have read her sentiments the

shock might have caused her to behave more carefully in the future! Nothing, however, could exceed her correctness now; Joyce, who was swimming about by herself, was overjoyed and thought that probably That One had given up the idea of mischief for the day. Laughing and splashing in the shallows, with innocent eyes, Phyllis did not betray her mind, which was ashamed and alarmed. She knew that she was detected; Cynthia had not deceived her for a moment.

At last the bathers came out of the water, and Alan returned from his stroll inland. Both Peter and Cynthia were relieved. They were in dread of being left together, for Peter was by this time sensible of a change in the girl's manner which could only be explained on the supposition that she had seen the naughty deed on the cliff. His brain was in a tumult, and his worst fears were realised when on starting he asked her to walk with him and was answered, "I don't *want* to walk with you, Peter." The courage that he had collected in order to make the request dissolved on the instant, and Miss Taliesin found him not merely distrait but positively wanting in wits.

After the descent into the Rocky Valley, the beauties of which were lost upon Peter, she and Alan said goodbye and turned aside to explore it thoroughly. Cynthia now ran in front, fleeing from herself as well as from Laurence, who was close at her heels. The two sprang over the stream and up the rugged track as though pursued, and Joyce and Phyllis, not to be outdone, were after them like mountain goats. On the path across the plateau above Cynthia still led the way, Laurence having dropped behind; and the party filed singly along the cliff edge, a row of white-clad girls and men. Ahead of them came into view their objective, the pierced crag, hanging high above the sea, called the Ladies' Window. On their right were grass uplands, which rose beyond Travalga Village to the sweep of the downs; on their left was an airy void. The sun was burning hot. No cloud moved in the blue, and the ocean

was silent; its surface glittering and flashing like a great sheet of beaten steel.

Arrived at the crag Cynthia climbed through and without hesitation stepped down on the narrow ledge which is the brink of the precipice. "The water is wonderfully clear!" she cried. "I can make out the veins in the boulders at the bottom of the sea."

Laurence spoke to Peter and Joyce. "Will you leave me with Miss Bremner afterwards? I should be very grateful."

"All right," said Peter, unwillingly, as Cynthia appeared in the cleft. "Who's coming next?" she asked, and leapt to the ground.

"Not I, thanks," said Laurence. "I value my life too much just now."

"I'll go," called Phyllis, eager to prove the steadiness of her nerves, but on seeing what was before her she got Cynthia to stand close and hold her hand through the opening while she snatched a glance over the edge.

"I suppose we must let him," whispered Joyce to Peter.

"Can't help it, I'm afraid!"

"Come along, then. I don't want to go through there."

And when Phyllis returned and ran after them, Laurence begged the surprised Cynthia to sit down and chat.

"There are seal caves below these cliffs," he told her, "and a wreck, five fathoms down, like the Santa Catharina below the Shutter, where Amyas sat in *Westward Ho!*"

Cynthia sprang alertly to her feet. "No, no," he cried, amused. "It isn't to be seen from above. What a restless girl you are!"

"It's a holiday," said Cynthia, excusing herself. She dropped down further away.

Laurence collected himself, summoned all his energies of intellect and will, and said: "Rosemary, please listen in patience to the whole of what I am going to say, before beginning to form a decision. I love you, and

I want you to marry me. I know you are not what is called 'in love' with me, and that it would be your first impulse to refuse me hastily. That is natural and right enough, but you must not act on impulse. You have brains. You are not an ordinary silly girl, and I am sure you are too just to refuse me a hearing. May I go on?"

The unexpectedness of the appeal made its effect on Cynthia. Her generosity and her vanity were attacked with equal skill, and her first fluttered shyness almost dispelled by his tone of studied moderation. She had never been proposed to in this way before. The novelty, coming from Laurence, brought a startled sense of relief, and curiosity helped him as well. There was nothing in his appearance to warn her, as his eyes were bent on the ground. He had self-control enough left not to look at her. She stole a glance, and reassured, "Yes!" she said.

"You want freedom, I've seen that. I can give you freedom. You are ambitious, I also. We should start sufficiently high and there would be no limit to the power we might obtain if we chose to employ our abilities socially. To do this requires a developed intellect, and you are not afraid of work. If you marry me you will become what you were intended to be, a woman of brains and authority as well as of charm and beauty. I love you. I would be good to you as in me lay. Will you pity me?"

What rose to her mind was the memory of the hatefulness of Peter. Stammering, she said: "I do-don't love you, do-I?" Because his passion went deep he was aware she did not, but his self-control was leaving him, and victory seemed very near to sight.

"I think you might yet," he said. "You've been near it once or twice!"

She looked at him, terrified at she knew not what, but far from comprehension. "Oh, I haven't!" she protested, unconsciously cruel.

He made a last effort, rigid, holding himself in. "You could be so very free, you know," he pleaded. "You could do and learn and see just whatever you wanted all

the rest of your life. And have your own friends. I'm not a jealous man." (Did he believe the lie?) "You could go out and come in at your own times, visit art galleries, choose dresses, read and study, motor. You could dive and swim as much as you pleased."

He had lost! "Phyllis has been talking," was Cynthia's first, carelessly secure deduction. Then she remembered. At Portman Square he had wanted to know if she swam. He had spoken of visiting Cornwall simply to bathe with her. He had——! Her thoughts stopped with a sudden jar and flew on racing. What did being married mean? Yes, yes, but it was natural, there wasn't any immodesty, Mummy had said so. What made her think of it now? That wasn't the *important* part of being married, was it? . . . Laurence would deny it, if she asked him. He'd talked as though other things were more important . . . talked of her mode of life, her freedom; never mentioned companionship. What could be his point of view? Why, he had not . . . No, not once had he spoken of himself! What would she be to him?

"Wait a minute," she said aloud, with the feeling as if a cold hand were clutching at her heart. She trembled with fear. She remembered how in her bedroom one night, after gazing at 'Eve' upon the wall, she had slipped a white arm from her nightgown, turned to her mirror and, taking the exact pose of the statue, had let the garment fall to the ground and looked with shy wonderment on her naked beauty. The reflection had startled her with the sight of a young divinity, tall and slender, whose bare body and limbs shone in the blaze of the electric light with the clearness of marble, a girl supple and vigorous as Diana, graceful as 'Eve' herself, crowned with a great wreath of hair, having wide, grey eyes that dropped abashed before hers, while the splendid shoulders and even the arms of the vision grew rose-stained, as they stooped towards the drapery about the snowy little feet. . . . She was beautiful! Was this what Mr. Man desired in return—she would not think of him again as Laurence—was it her beauty?

"No," she said, "I'm sorry! I can't marry you."

Laurence had seen her cheeks and neck flush red. His own face darkened into sombreness.

"I love you," he repeated.

"You don't!" said Cynthia, rudely and hotly.

"I do!" he replied, fixing his gaze upon her. "You silly child! You little fool! You don't know how a man can love. You are afraid to know."

"I am," she said, briefly, turning her face away.

"A coward! Cynthia Bremner, a coward, before what——"

"I've given you my answer!"

"I won't take it."

"You must!"

"I tell you I will not, Cynthia."

"Don't call me by that name! I've never given you leave. Never! Never!"

"It's Shaun James's name, isn't it?" shouted Laurence. "And I am not to use it! No, but young Middleton may! I'll make him suffer for that, *Rosemary!* And James, your Platonic friend, making love to you all the time, the dirty sneak!——"

"—— I hate you! Please, be silent."

"You hate me, and he makes love to you all the time, the cad! Please be silent! Oh, yes, I'll be silent, for I feel like silence!" He lowered his voice suddenly, almost to a whisper, touching the ground on either side of him with his fingers as if to assure himself of reality. "You've ended me. God! How I love you! And Shaun James gets you. He gets you, after all, the sneak!"

"He doesn't!" said Cynthia, great tears rolling down her cheeks, sobs shaking her slender body.

"Will you swear that? Will you, will you?"

"No, no, I can't." At this moment Shaun appeared in her thoughts as a relieving angel.

Laurence looked at her craftily. "Can you swear he does not make love to you—Mr. Platonic Shaun? Your Mother would like to know, and so should I!"

Cynthia managed to fight back her sobs, and faced him

bravely. "I do hate you," she said, "but I'm sorry I was brutal. I won't answer any of your questions. Leave me alone, please. You've said enough, and we can't understand one another better."

The change in her voice acted on him like a spell. He threw himself before her and kissed her silk-clad ankles. "Forgive me!" he cried. "I was mad to speak to you like that. I am mad, I think. But I love you so. You believe that, Rosemary? You must believe it, for it's truth. Only care for me a very little, and I'll be perfect to you, and snatch the Gates of Heaven, if you want them, for a plaything! Oh, my saint, forgive me!"

Gently she drew her feet away, and he sat up. She shook her head. "It's no good!" she said. "I'm awfully sorry. I *am* sorry for you, Laurence." The sign of weakness brought upon her a fresh torrent of asseverations. It was in vain. . . . He threatened, and was furious. He beat at her defences. The others peeped at them from a distance and went away again unperceived. . . . He began to repeat himself. Cynthia was faint and dizzy and deadly tired and sick at heart, but she would not yield. . . . Then suddenly he commenced to concentrate the whole of his power on wringing from her a single concession. Would she be to him as before? Would she let him see her? Cynthia did not wish it; she knew she would be foolish to give way on that point; she saw clearly how much more it would involve than the promise implied. She struggled hard.

"*I'm* jolly well going back," said Joyce. "I don't believe Cyn wanted to be left with him all this time."

"I don't care what he thinks," agreed Phyllis. "Come along. We ought to be starting, anyway."

"He's had a good innings," confirmed Peter.

"Anyone can see what's up!" murmured Phyllis, as they approached. "Now talk at the tops of your voices."

But they arrived an instant too late. Cynthia had committed herself to friendship.

. . . . .

On the way back she recovered her spirits, with the elasticity of youth. The others saw that she was pale,

and they joked and laughed to cover her embarrassment until she was able to share their mirth. Then That One took charge of Laurence, who had not said a single word, and marched him on in front, and Cynthia began to tell Peter of her merits, partly from gratitude, partly from another reason. She recited to him the accomplishments of Phyllis, who could do fine embroidery, toe-dance, play billiards brilliantly, write poetry (not so well), speak French and Italian, play a good round of golf——"

"Fair round of golf," from Joyce who was a critic.

"She passed the Matric, with honours, and is a clever gymnast," Cynthia concluded.

"She *is* that," admitted Joyce, who had reason to know. "When Auntie doesn't come down to watch us bathe, she stays out turning cartwheels and doing somersaults on her hands like a street-boy, and I can't get her into the water."

"She won the gym medal at school. She's supple and can twist herself into all kinds of contortions." Cynthia began to laugh: "Do you remember Mother catching her one day?"

Joyce grinned at the recollection. "Don't I, Cyn! It was heavenly. That One tied up in knots, and trying to disentangle herself while Auntie Emmie just gave it her! You and I got blamed too."

"You did, you mean. I hadn't encouraged her!"

"It's the only time I've ever seen Phyl go scarlet. When Auntie had done with her she was like a tomato."

"And I'm a beast to give her away!" cried Cynthia, in sudden distress. "I meant to praise her to Peter."

"I don't know why you should!" exclaimed Joyce, tactfully departing to overtake the others.

Peter was nettled by Cynthia's tone, which had certainly implied Phyllis to be his particular chum, if not something closer. His conscience was clear regarding the events of the afternoon and he was glad to have an explanation at last. "I don't either," he said rather warmly. "She's a nice enough girl, but, really, Cynthia, she's not any especial friend of mine."

Cynthia gazed straight before her. "Isn't she?"

"No, upon my honour!"

"Then why did you let her kiss you, please?" Icily it was said, for Cynthia was surprised at the volume of anger she was capable of on account of what did not concern her, and she would not allow her voice to tremble.

"I don't very well see how I could help it!" replied Peter with fervour.

Cynthia smiled. She was relieved as well as amused, immensely relieved, so much so that nothing seemed to matter any more, and the path began to sway beneath her and the sea to swell before her eyes to the level of the top of the cliff. She stood still.

"I'm only a little faint, thank you; it's all right," she said, clinging to his wrist but holding herself pluckily upright. "It is passing. I've had such an awful afternoon, you don't know. . . . But it oughtn't to make me like this. . . . I'm not an idiot, Peter; only a moment and I'll be able to go on."

"Dear Cynthia!" he whispered. "Dear!"

"I had to refuse him, oh, so many times. The whole time I was away with him he was attacking me, trying to make me alter. . . . And oh, Peter, I'm tired, and it seemed horrid if I'd lost you this day of all days. I've probably got to lose Shaun as it is, and I do love my friends!" She released his wrist and moved slowly on. "You will be my friend, won't you, Peter? I'm sorry I thought you were flirting with Phyllis. I've been horrid altogether this afternoon; but it's difficult, being a girl, sometimes!"

"I'll be whatever you want," he promised. "Always!"

"That's nice of you!" she rejoiced, turning to him candid eyes full of a troubled sweetness. Her mind was not wholly relieved until she had added, "I don't know why I so hate to say this; I'm not jealous as a rule, truly I'm not. But please be nice to Phyllis, Peter, and be her friend, too!"

The others were waiting to be overtaken. He had time to answer, "Yes, I'll try!"

Then Laurence claimed her.

X

"Mother, I can't discuss it any more," said Cynthia lamentably. "I'm worn out, and, please, I do so want to forget about it, and go to sleep!"

"Don't say another word, darling," Lady Bremner assured her. "Only he was so certain you hesitated, and it would have been a marriage Daddy and I could quite approve. Are you sure you won't change, Rosemary? He's terribly cut up, poor fellow!"

"I know he is!" cried Cynthia, exasperated.

"Hush, dear. Joyce is not asleep yet."

"He told me so a hundred times, and I'm not likely ever to forget it. Mummy, I've promised to let him try to make me care, and I can't do more, and I *am* fearfully tired! Really and truly I've got a headache, and want to go to sleep."

Lady Bremner kissed her tenderly, and went out. "She has refused him," she informed her husband, whom she found in their bedroom, just come up after a final game of billiards with Phyllis.

"Whom? Polly looks washed out to-night. Has she been receiving a proposal?"

"Didn't you notice Laurence Man's face of despair, Everard? He might have more control over his emotions, I must admit! Rosemary is a very charming girl, but scarcely old enough to inspire a *grande passion!*"

"I'm not sorry, Lina. Nor do I regret her refusal. Man is a very good fellow in some ways, but not good enough for Polly. Alan sees more of him than I do and does not care for him. No, I was afraid you meant some boy-and-girl affair with young Middleton. Remember, I did not see Man; I was out when he came in."

"Peter Middleton! He's far too nice a boy to be so silly!" smiled Lady Bremner. "Of course you did not see Laurence, dear! How excessively stupid of me! But I am really grieved and disappointed by what has occurred to-day."

"And I am not, Lina. I shall not stand in their way if he persuades her to change her mind, but I sincerely trust it will not happen. One can't help wishing girls would not grow up. I'd hate to part with little Polly . . ." He moved to his dressing-room door. "Still, it'll have to be done some day, I suppose! Are you ready for Marie? Shall I ring?"

XI

THE next morning was Alan's last at Tintagel; he and Miss Taliesin were leaving by the mid-day train. Sunrise was bright and cold. The whole sea was in turmoil and the far-off islets disappeared in the spray of breakers. Into the window of his room came a thundering roar composed of many voices howling and bellowing, as the great white horses charged upon the enemy in continuous, furious succession, only to be dashed to pieces against the bulwark of the cliffs. Mingled with it were moaning cries and yells of despair, but the deep-sounding clamour of assault rose higher and, borne by the wind, came as a steady and unceasing uproar.

The sunshine beckoned Alan. He slipped on coat and trousers and a pair of shoes, and seeing Peter already below waiting, hurried down to join him. "Bossiney, and let's run it! Our cove is hopeless in this heavy sea." They ran the distance, a mile, in just over five minutes and came in neck and neck.

Oh, the glory of the dive through the green curl of a white-topped wave, and the strong swimming in the foaming surf, and the rush back to shore, and the stinging glow of the rub-down with a hard towel afterwards! As they walked home through the lanes the sunshine was delicate upon the sparkling grass, and birds saluted it with a madrigal, and Peter saw the world all rosy from the east.

Alan talked of Phyllis: how her people would do anything for her; they were immensely wealthy and she an only daughter. She could marry whom she pleased—"unlike Sissy," as he put in—and he changed the subject to his journey without giving an opportunity of reply. But Peter did not wish to com-

ment. His youth was on wings, and the flight delirious.

The joy of greeting Cynthia, more wonderful on each new day in the health of her slender loveliness, clothed in garments that embraced her with a white gentle dignity, and the thrill from the warm pressure of her hand, and the grey sweetness of her kind eyes that raised themselves so frankly to meet his! Then, the sea-hunger! The ordered fineness of the breakfast-table, the unobtrusive, watchful service of experienced maids; the light, merry conversation that danced and rippled across the mahogany like the airy sunbeams that streamed above it! The chaff that did not hurt, and the plans that never came off; the adventures of bathing and climbing, of birds and fishes; the wild imitations of Cornish dialect from Joyce and Phyllis, and the cleverer, closer ones from Cynthia, and Alan's parody of the local news in the morning paper; the quick discussion of foreign politics, mingled with scattered words of dress-talk from the girls; Miss Taliesin's dry humour; Lady Bremner's civil, gracious tones, formed together an harmonious earth-song for his soaring spirit, which swooped downward to meet a glance, or a laughing word, and mounted again eagerly to the regions of ethereal happiness!

But Cynthia was in trouble, and to-day Peter soon came down to the dull, drab earth because of the ache which men call sympathy. He was not yet fully experienced in the use of his wings, or would have flown higher, and gained the greater strength thereby.

The morning passed in wonderment and farewells. It was not possible for him, knowing as little as he did, to avoid the conclusion that both the Bremner parents favoured Laurence as a suitor. To what extent their support would now be given, was the problem that exercised his mind. Would they bully Cynthia? Would they apply steady, quiet pressure by the statement of their hopes and wishes at every opportunity? He had no idea, any more than he could tell why Lady Bremner, having made so much of Miss Taliesin and tried so hard to get to know her intimately, nevertheless, was openly

relieved when the wagonette had driven away from the door.

In the afternoon, about an hour after lunch, Cynthia, who had been lying in the hammock slung across the verandah at the back of the house, listening to every footfall within with an expectant face, as Peter who was reading *The Times* in the morning-room could not help but notice, sat suddenly up and with a swirl of white skirts and brown silk stockings alighted gracefully on her feet. In the same motion she darted indoors and across the room, knocking over a vase of roses and not pausing to set right their tumbled glories, and was out into the hall; and again with a thrill Peter heard a maid announce, "Mr. Shaun James." Something caused him to remember oddly, aloud, "That girl is like a white chrysanthemum——" Dressed for the evening she was like one, too! And then Shaun entered, Cynthia close, cheeks pink, eyes starrily beaming on this dearest of her friends, and Peter became wildly jealous. He was greeted; as he was going out, Lady Bremner came in.

"How do you do, Mr. James?" She sailed forward, extending a welcoming hand. "Oh, here you are, Rosemary! Darling! The vase is overturned, by your elbow. Look, child! We had no hope of seeing you, Mr. James. It is a great pleasure. Are you down for long?"

"A day, perhaps," replied Shaun, bending over her hand with twinkling eyes.

Disliking him, or to be more correct, finding him inconvenient as she did, Lady Bremner always compelled herself for that reason to scrupulous courtesy, and often her conscience drove her farther. She had forgiven him the unfortunate contretemps of his arrest before the dinner-party, and now, seeing the child so radiant, asked him to accompany them to the Rocky Valley after tea, "which you'll have with us, won't you?" He accepted. "I was bound there," he said, gravely. "It is a coincidence. I find myself called upon to describe it." Cynthia's dimple went in and out.

Try as he might, however, he could not succeed in

drawing the girl away. Lady Bremner held her ground and kept him occupied. Now Sir Everard came in and listened with perfectly distrustful politeness to the same excuse, delivered in a more business-like tone this time and with added enthusiasm. ("A good lie," Shaun was accustomed to say, "grows upon one. Remember that it does not necessarily grow upon one's audience.")

"In a novel?" inquired Sir Everard. "Are we to look forward to it?"

Shaun drew upon another of his aphorisms, "A good lie should never appear in public undraped. Dress the little creature in gaudy corroborations." "I want it for a friend in the States," he said aloud, "who needs it for a lecture on this district. He has the right to ask a good deal from me." Sir Everard's expression did not alter, but Cynthia knew that he was inclined to belief, and rejoiced. However he took charge of Shaun until tea-time.

"Must Laurence come, Mother?" asked Cynthia, aside, at the first opportunity.

"I'm afraid he must, dear, if he wants to. We asked him, you know."

"Oh, Mother!" said Cynthia, turning away.

"You gave him your promise," was the relentless reminder.

And Laurence, to Lady Bremner's mild surprise, arrived to tea as he had been bidden. It was a bold move, for the mother was immediately led to wonder whether Rosemary had exaggerated the vehemence of her refusal. In any case, she decided, he ought to have made an excuse and stayed away from the meal. It was taking much more for granted than was necessary; and he could very well have joined them afterwards. However, Laurence had schooled himself and, although half crazy with jealousy, behaved with absolute discretion. Sir Everard, who was by this time determined to protect his property in little Polly with vigour, frowned when he saw him, for which his daughter surreptitiously stroked his sleeve. It was Shaun's high spirits which took the attention of all during the uncomfortable meal. Sir

Everard, who had usually found him entertaining, came near to admiration of what he regarded as supreme social tact. And Shaun, whose merriment was genuine, had never more desired his goodwill, which increased in value by being only partially deserved. The spectacle of a diplomat, a professional rival in the detective art, misreading character, was an amusement to the novelist.

Sir Everard had his revenge when the start was made, for he retained Shaun firmly by his side, and the party did not break up until they had passed the old Mill which stands at the head of the Rocky Valley, surrounded in its charming solitude by ashes, elms, and sycamores. Then the two elders fell behind and the young people, among whom Shaun must be counted by virtue of his art, proceeded in a body down the winding gorge, following the stream, which rippled over its slaty bed with a rush and a murmur. The cliffs on either side grew more precipitous. What had been merely an outcrop of slate shelving from turfy banks now assumed the character of the walls of a ravine, with fantastic ledges and pinnacles to which the green vegetation clung, nestling in crevices and spread over the slopes like a carpet of rich colour. Ferns grew by the edge of the stream, and the rocks there were covered with velvety moss. Blue butterflies flitted. Up the valley continuously came the roar of the breakers on the tiny beach, a sound which increased in volume as bend after bend was passed, until they came in sight of the advancing waves and felt the weight of the wind and smelt brine, standing with lofty cliffs close on either hand so that they glanced round instinctively at the way they had come to make sure there was a means of escape. After the sylvan beauties of the upper part of the Valley the mouth seemed like a trap set by the sentinels of Nature, and the angry sea a devourer.

On the backward road they lingered, straggling in changing groups, but still, through Laurence's watchfulness, Shaun did not succeed in drawing Cynthia apart. She and Phyllis leaped recklessly from ledge to ledge

and clambered up and down the rugged walls, Cynthia always leading, the bolder and the more agile at this mountaineer work, although much the longer skirted! Joyce followed with comparative caution and in a moody silence. Her blade of grass was between her lips, lending her an air of jauntiness, which Shaun saw through. He had known the child in her wide-awake moods. Now she had retired into herself, and not because she felt neglected; Cynthia's kindness and frank comradeship precluded that. He joined her and, carefully looking away, said, "I wish you'd talk to me about your people, Joyce."

She glanced up, startled; but his voice had been so natural and unconcerned that she was not made shy, and yet the sympathy in it could not be mistaken. She lost her reserve forthwith and gladly chattered to him of India. Long afterwards, Cynthia told him it was the nicest thing he had ever done, and Shaun said to her: "A few little actions of that sort, and some love not made, are all I've got to rely on in the Day of Judgment, dear!" Joyce always liked him after this. She divided her allegiance between him and Peter.

Aided by the departure of Shaun, Laurence drew Cynthia aside to admire the waterfall.

"I want to tell you I'm sorry," he said, hurriedly. "Forgive me. I'll be your friend."

Cynthia hesitated.

"I can't help loving you; but I will not bother you. Let me be a friend. Let me help to find you work, if you are resolved upon a career. I am in a position to advise on such matters, and perhaps to influence your father and mother."

She could not keep surprise from her voice. "Thank you; *really* thank you! I cannot let you do it, though."

"You distrust me!" he said with anger.

"I think it might . . . might be better for you not to see me," said Cynthia, trembling.

Laurence began to insist: "You told me you did not mean to marry at present and I judged from that and from what you have let drop at various times that you

want to enter a profession or to go into business. I could be of assistance to you. Why not give me the pleasure, which would be great?"

"I can't. Please don't ask me."

"I do ask you."

"I may not want to get work of that sort. I have not made up my mind."

"It is probable that you will," he said, coolly. "I ask it as a sign of your forgiveness."

"One can't *tell* what one will do, beforehand," argued Cynthia, hopeless of escape, "and I won't promise. I don't see how I can."

"I mean to prove that you can trust me. I will leave you with Mr. James, even to-day, which is my last day here, if you desire it. His arrival seemed unexpected" —Laurence had concealed his sneer, as he thought, perfectly; but Cynthia read him and hardened her heart—"and he may have news of importance. Meanwhile, Rosemary, I count myself your friend. When I reach town I will get information regarding women's professions and write to you."

"Don't!" she said.

He looked at her sadly. "Are you so bitter?" he asked. "You promised to allow more than that. I'm only asking for friendship now."

As he spoke he almost believed it. Cynthia was young, easily caught by an appeal to her generous instincts. The interview had proved less bad than she feared. She felt she owed him gratitude, and she was longing to escape to Shaun. "If you can do that without trouble to yourself, and if you still wish to when you get home," she began slowly—"only it doesn't bind me to anything, nor you either,—I should be grateful for some information. We ought to be joining the others now."

He had obtained his concession. The need for self-restraint was gone as soon as her back was turned; she would have been startled by the despair and anger on his face. He had thanked her quite simply. He had done the very best he could until the end. Now he gazed after her, tortured; and jealousy of Shaun seized

and shook him like a fever, so that Joyce, who caught a glimpse of him as she was glancing back, stifled a cry, clutching at Shaun's sleeve.

"What's the matter?" said Shaun, stopping amazed, for her voice and gesture had conveyed positive terror.

"It's all right, Mr. James. I can't see straight, that's all. I thought that Man looked weird. It must have been the sun making him screw his eyes up."

Laurence was impassive when he overtook them. Shaun noticed at once that he bore the full sunlight without blinking and there the incident ended, Joyce being luckily engaged with Cynthia. Shaun and Laurence talked golf, a game which neither of them played.

Meanwhile Phyllis, who had not disturbed Peter for twenty-four hours and was conscious of having let him perceive that she was shy of him, proceeded to avenge herself upon the male creature who had seen her at a disadvantage. Cynthia had forgiven her; she need no longer be ashamed and call herself minx.

"You are sullen, bad boy," she smiled.

"I'm in a very bad temper," said Peter.

"Don't mind me! Say 'in a devil of a temper,' if you feel that way! You are very young, you know, Peter. It's absurd of you to be jealous of an elderly fogey like Shaun James. Rosie would never marry anyone so old—he must be nearly forty. She only wants to pour out her soul to him."

"My good kid," observed Peter, "you are talking absolute rot!"

Phyllis skipped. "Drawn him!" she cried. "Is it nice to be kissed by a pretty kid, Peter?"

"No."

"Not nice?"

"Not at all."

"Then it *is* nice!"

"No, not at all nice, when you haven't invited the kid, Phyllis."

She was too fond of teasing to be vexed with him when the play was only half done. "Then you won't

marry me, Peter darling?" He looked so horrified that she fell into gurgles of delighted and delicious laughter.

"I'm afraid not," he said, shaking his head. "You see I should thrash you if we were married, and that wouldn't do, would it?"

"Really you are becoming interesting, boy! What makes you think I should let you beat me?"

But Peter had relapsed into shyness and would not answer, and soon she turned away and walked with Joyce and Cynthia.

At the Mill, Sir Everard and Lady Bremner were waiting, and Cynthia said boldly, "Mother, I'm going to take Shaun to St. Nectan's Kieve. We'll walk quickly and then I shall be back in time to dress." It was one of the advantages of Shaun, she knew, that he never looked surprised whatever one said or did, and now he backed her, saying in a quiet tone, from his place by Laurence, "I should be sorry to miss the Kieve."

"Have you seen it?" Lady Bremner asked Laurence.

"I was there this morning," replied the latter, not truthfully.

Peter in haste started on with Phyllis and Joyce, which was foolish of him, as it attracted the attention of Sir Everard whose gaze had been on the stream.

"Goodbye, Daddy!" called Cynthia, escaping.

They walked between high hedges twined about with morning-glories and sweet-scented honeysuckle, and green with branching fronds of tall osmunda, and pierced with the spears of nodding foxgloves; and for a time were silent. Cynthia was too happy in the rest and peace that this man's presence gave her, and Shaun was afraid to break the glamour which held him enchanted in a midsummer land of youth and faëry joy. "You've no idea," he said at last, "how much a writer longs to behold with the outward vision the beautiful, magical scenes and people which he has to conjure up in fancy by an effort of the will."

"I can imagine," Cynthia softly echoed.

"It is relief," he went on, turning to look at her, "past words to express, to have romance incarnated

before one in the splendour of a Cornish lane with the last sunrays bright on its eastern hedgerow, and the beauty of a willowy, rose-and-white girl of the kingdom of dreams, who glides in silver raiment looking deep into the hearts of men through wise and dancing eyes! And is all woman . . . a child of earth with sweet faults, and dear, tender failings . . . Cynthia! Have you good news for me? I read your wire, and I trembled. Something said, 'She's a girl who wants help from her chum,' but another voice cried louder, 'If she's found she loves you, you are free.' ''

''I only said, 'Come, please!' '' she faltered, overwhelmed by her own inconsiderate folly. How reckless, how selfish had been her message! What right had she to summon him only because she felt wretched? Wicked Cynthia! She hated herself and learnt, if she had ever doubted it, that she did not love him. Fool that she was! She remembered the disquiet with which she had read and re-read his letters. But he had sworn friendship in the British Museum! He was her friend, Shaun James, her pal, not——

''It is really quite safe and right for me to make love to you,'' said Shaun's voice beside her, ''because of the negative results. Don't be sorry, dear.''

''I *am* sorry,'' she said, looking at him through tear-dimmed eyes.

''Don't, Cynthia! Girls who have style, who wear their clothes so well as you do, should never regret, and straight-backed girls should never apologise. That's a rule! And I shall learn by experience, like Joyce, who says that after the first day with Phyllis she always ate her chocolates immediately. 'That's the worst,' she told me in a sententious voice, 'of intercommunicating bedrooms. I don't know where to keep my chocolates.' I chaffed her. 'A good long word you've got there, Joyce.' 'You're welcome to it,' she flashed back, cheeky as you please. I'm not complaining. She cheeked as a sign of confidence. Last time we met she was very polite. It's all right, Cynthia! Truly it's all right!''

"It's all wrong, and it's my fault. I'm the stupidest beast!"

"My dear, if you had any notion how ridiculous are that epithet and noun applied to a person so coolly decorative and yet so warmly alive as your brilliant self; you would withdraw them."

"Oh, Shaun, I don't feel brilliant!"

"Don't you see how cleverly I'm suggesting that my admiration for you is the artist's and not the man's—while remaining perfectly honest? I am convincing myself, chum. You cannot help looking as though you felt brilliant, and that is the main point. Looks, looks, looks! Even your sorrow, your shame, are brilliant. Your eyes are large and deep like truthful wells and your cheeks of the softest rose and—I'm a fool! The horse is a noble animal, with a leg at each corner. Is this beautiful house Trethevey? And what is the little building there, with a cross on it? Is it a well?"

"It's St. Piran's Holy Well."

"Quiller-Couch wrote about St. Piran."

"I call here for a key. A barn in the farmyard was once a chapel of St. Piran. Would you care to look for it, while I go in?"

"I consider the saint the property of Q. No, I'll stay here and converse with the gander. He and I are brothers. Don't let either of us peck you, Cynthia!"

"I'm not afraid!" she said, and approached the door.

When she returned, "I'm cunningly arrayed against my own cunning," said Shaun. "There is to be no deception. I freely admit it is vanity which causes me to say that had I the right I could make love in a very different, more real, and I flatter myself, more effective manner! It is rooted in my mind that I could get you to love me! There, another safeguard! A lover should hold that conviction, but never declare it. This is a lovely walk, and the grasshoppers are jeering at us. Oh yes, at you as well as at me, because they can't understand what are the crystal things trickling down your cheeks."

"Shaun dear, if you asked me very hard, I believe I should marry you," exclaimed Cynthia.

"So do I," said Shaun. "You are very fond of me, and very generous and soft-hearted. But no, listen to the blackbird. It is indignant at the bare suggestion, whistling 'Be wise!' Wisdom is knowing the right uses of things, and the conscience of Shaun James tells him he was born to be the chum of a beautiful young woman called Cynthia Rosemary Bremner. Do I sound very maudlin, pronouncing the name? Don't answer. Tell me of the evil deeds of the Byronic individual with a fish heart who has a genius for finance and for worrying my pal. It must be he who brought me to this fairy stream, exquisite in flickering shade, dimpling with gentlest whispers past fern and bush and lichened stone." He added mentally, "For young Peter has not yet boiled over, in spite of his face of adoration. Where are the eyes of those parents? And where the Dear One's?"

"That's it!" said Cynthia, with bent head.

"He was so deadly polite to me," laughed Shaun. "Poor thing, you're having a holiday indeed! The fatal result of loveliness and charm and being so excessively nice a girl. You're the perfection of your type, my chum. The result of all the beauty and brains and pleasant minds and courage and fine breeding of hundreds of ancestors, all from the same fortunate class, born to honour as well as to honours."

"Great-grandfather was a merchant sailor," put in the chum.

"He was a Bremner. Forgive my stupid talk. Tell on, and command my sympathy, dear. I'm serious now, the old Shaun James, purged of the older Adam."

And as he listened, while sunlight shivered into twilight and the gnats danced intricately above the running water and a robin called with unearthly sweetness, they reached a little door, 'leading to a fairy country,' and opening it saw the pool of St. Nectan at the foot of a waterfall which sparkled in two cascades to a rock-rimmed basin below. They wandered back, still deep in talk, and went homeward through dusky lanes by a Stone Cross, driving before them a flock of straying sheep which glimmered ghostlike with sudden rushes and

swift scurrying retreats until in Bossiney village they took a turning and vanished into memory. "Maa-a-a," came a bleat of farewell out of the past and the darkness; and Cynthia and Shaun moved on more quickly.

They halted at the Wharncliffe door. "It's good-bye," he said, holding her hand the little longer that says so much which may not be spoken. "I go to-morrow by the earliest train. My Mother isn't very fit. I must visit her. Widows are lonely people."

"I oughtn't to have kept you from her. But you *have* helped me, Shaun, and I've twice the courage that I had! Thank you, chum dear! She isn't really ill, I hope? And she lives so far north. It was doubly good of you to come to me."

He answered carelessly enough. "Nothing much, I expect. She writes cheerfully. She's a brave old lady, who lives for bridge and reads Smollett."

But inside he found a telegram repeated from his rooms, signed with a doctor's name, bidding him come for she was dying.

XII

The last train had left Camelford in the afternoon. Shaun decided to hire a car and motor to Plymouth to catch the midnight express. By half-past nine he was leaning back beside the chauffeur, under a lofty sky of towering, fantastic clouds, lit by the gleam of a gibbous moon. In front the glaring headlights opened an avenue in the darkness, up which mile after white mile flew to meet them; trees swayed mysteriously above the road and were gone; hills swung in the dim distance and were replaced by other hills. Overhead, cloudlets fleeced across the disc of the moon in hurried procession; but the upper air was quiet, and the giants who obscured the stars marched in the pageant of night with a grave and deliberate majesty.

The connection was made with minutes to spare, and thenceforward the clatter of the train accompanied his black thoughts with a sinister racket of threats and warnings. Many times through the long hours of darkness outside, which he endured curled up, lonely and desolate, in the bright compartment, he sighed for the smooth purr of the motor. Unable to concentrate, he suffered clear pictures of old days to crowd through his mind, each momentary, vivid as flashlight and not to be forgotten. She had been a stern mother to his childhood, a stern judge of the untruth of imagination and the half-truth of fear, which were evil in her sight as treachery and greed. Yet she had loved him. He remembered caresses after the good-night hymn had been read, a sweet offered shyly, received almost with dread, and the sigh with which she had noticed his shrinking. The child had not understood, the man pitied the tragedy of temperaments. We artists, he thought, are a curse to ourselves and to those around us from the beginning to

the end. Beauty is born of suffering, and it is not we alone who pay. All who love us are part of the great sacrifice whereby beauty is revealed to the world as was Love upon the Cross. Mother would call the comparison blasphemous. Ah, but it isn't! We are unwilling victims, Christ gave Himself. There is the difference.

Morning dawned grey beneath a nimbus and the rain was thick as mist. Shaun was travelling on another line, speeding north, asleep. He dreamt of her face bending above him, vast and madonna-like, and he was a very little babe, for her shoulders seemed the width of his cot. He longed to call out, "Mother, I loved you after all. I love you still," but his tongue clove to his lips, and there was a roaring and a rushing as of many waters and she was swept up and away, leaving him stretching out weak arms and crying bitterly. He awoke to the rumble of the train, tears streaming down his cheeks. The fat commercial opposite had hidden himself behind the *Chronicle* of the day before, and emerged flushed and uneasily compassionate.

They ran smoothly into the curve of York Station about one o'clock, and Shaun drove with a heart full of dread to his mother's home near the Cathedral. The blinds were up and his terror abated. He was a man easily overwhelmed, with the facile, uncontrollable imagination of the writer, but he was called upon now to play the stoic, to match the courage of an indomitable old woman and if he could not live to please her at least to be what she would have him on the last occasion when they would see each other as in a glass darkly, and not with the eyes of the soul. He strung himself to the pitch of her strong character; and tapped with the old brass knocker. The familiar sound echoed in the narrow dark street of lofty houses and was drowned in the rattle and throb of the departing taxi. Both noises seemed portentously loud and, although Shaun knew her bedroom to be on the second story, at the back, across a corridor and protected by the thick walls of an honest builder, he regretted what he had done. The new anxiety helped the moment of waiting to pass, but suspense was agonis-

ing before the door slowly opened, and in the aperture was thrust the withered face of Martha who had been his mother's nursemaid sixty years ago.

"Am I in time?"

"Ay, she's been worriting for ye, Master Shaun."

There were thirty stairs to climb behind shuffling Martha. A doctor encountered him at the top and bade him wait.

A sense of peace came with her near presence. He knew how much he had longed just for that, clinging passionately to the ease of the moment, as we must so often in this life. Was it the influence of his dream, or did he still love her indestructibly with the love of childhood? Shaun wondered with the cold detachment which is one of the phases of hysterical emotion. But he had inherited strength from her and from his father the country surgeon, the farmer's son who had overthrown countless objects to win culture and a profession and a Miss Bannister of York. He had self-control. When he had quarrelled with his mother there had been no loud words, in spite of which the breach had been inevitable and final. She had spoken of his godlessness and condemned his books with a caustic humour. They did not fit in with her particular creed and were therefore evil, but happily immature. He would grow out of such wicked nonsense; in the meantime it was wrong to infect Doris, poor child. Her duty was to make that very clear. She blamed him because Doris was High Church and called herself a Catholic, blamed Shaun, the lover of all honest creeds, the dilettante Platonist, but, as his heart, humble in the presence of death, told him, a philosopher true to his real self. Looking back he could not regret.

"I believe the Truth is that God is Love. There's my faith."

"That is not enough."

"We perceive God through Beauty, realise God through Truth, know God through Love."

"I will hear no more, Shaun."

She had heard no more, and since then she had been

good-humouredly eager to have him away from her. Her affection for the broad eighteenth-century writers, her passion for whist and of late years bridge, her fierce wit, her white hair piled high under a jet comb, her lace caps, one for each day in the week, her tyranny over Martha, her suppers to the Minister at which the good man's sermons underwent a rude handling while he was courteously entreated and fed with every North-Country delicacy, were known to the old ladies of York and approved by them. Shaun and his wife were not. Their appearance in the city became infrequent, and after the death of the younger Mrs. James Shaun paid only visits of duty, which he believed to be enjoyed by his mother as little as by himself.

The doctor had spoken in a calm manner which had helped to reassure him, but the delay was long and the son again grew agonised. What was going on behind that great oak door which he had not entered since childhood? As though in answer to his thought it slowly opened. The doctor stood on the threshold, beckoning. Shaun approached.

In the long, low room with its damask curtains half drawn across the lofty and narrow windows the sunshine was mellowed to a frail glow. It made a pool upon the polished floor, before the vast mahogany bed from whose shadow came a babbling voice that ran on continuously. A nurse sat silent. A small fire burnt in the grate and on the hob a kettle sang. A drawer of the ambry which stretched from floor to ceiling was open. Towels were visible in it. The nurse rose to her feet, a tall, stout woman. She emerged, passed lightly from the room. Shaun received an impression of plainness, capability, middle age. A smell of soap hung in the air. It was a disinfectant soap. The nurse's moon face had shone with rubbing. She was gone. She . . .

"Steady!" said the doctor under his breath, clutching Shaun's wrist.

The voice from the bed was repeating the forty-seventh psalm. Shaun had never heard that voice before. It was shockingly unfamiliar in delirium. But he knew

that his mother lay there. His brain grew clear, his colour came back, and the doctor released him.

"How long?" whispered Shaun.

"Not long. See if she recognises you."

At this moment there was a sudden hush in the room. The singing of the kettle became dominant. It filled the air, a sustained gentle sibilance. . . . His mother spoke. "Shaun!"

He moved into the shadow of the bed, and it seemed a bright light in which he saw her more distinctly than ever before. She was little and wasted and dauntless: that she had always been. Her white hair was smooth, her eyes dimmer, but to Shaun she was all love. He yearned to her as in his dream. She was his Mother, found.

"You *did* want me?" he pleaded.

"Always," said she, faintly, but with the old grim humour. "I used to wonder how a clever man like you failed to perceive it. Give me my handkerchief, child."

She had no strength to hold it. He helped her.

"The rôles reversed!" she commented, with closed eyes. And then with sorrow and some asperity, too—human to the end—she spoke to him of religion, and bade him not promise her what he did not mean to perform. "Listen and don't interrupt," she said. Her voice faded and rose again. The doctor was standing at the foot of the bed, watchful. . . . And now delirium seized her. "The Lamb!" she cried, powerfully. Then, "I dreamt last night that I was dead! It was a great disappointment to awake. I saw the golden shore, and the silver walls. I did not see the Face, but the White Hand was stretched out to me!" The light flickered in her old eyes, sprang up and died away. "Shaun!" she murmured once. . . . The singing of the kettle became audible in the room. . . . The doctor moved. He came forward and touched Shaun's arm.

. . . . . .

For the second time in his life Shaun knelt by a bedside and prayed with sobs. And as he did so her strength entered into him, and he made a resolution. He would conquer himself and leave Cynthia free.

XIII

THE last day of Peter's holiday approached with sudden swiftness. It came out of hiding like a beast of prey and advanced threateningly. People changed under its influence, or seemed to change. Perhaps it was only the departure of Alan and Miss Taliesin, Shaun and Laurence, causing Peter to be more conspicuous in the family party, that recalled Sir Everard to his duties of host and prevented Peter from being so much alone with Cynthia. Sir Everard was friendly in his dry fashion, which accepted Peter as a relative or a privileged person, but he sent Cynthia to bathe with the other girls at Trebarwith and took his guest sea-fishing. Phyllis was different, too. She flirted as outrageously as ever without having the air of expecting a response. And when she did expect it she ran away. At other times she treated Peter with a good deal of respect, and always kept a watch upon him of which he could not remain unconscious. He had no idea that she was beginning to be sorry for him.

Joyce was very sweet and kind to him, and in some ways appeared the oldest of them all in those last days. She still came to Peter to have shoe-laces tied or hair-ribbon arranged, but the mark of childish confidence and affection was now felt by him as a definite encouragement. "Cheer up," it said. "I know she likes you." Joyce had been distressed by Cynthia's praises of 'That One,' the meaning of which she had perfectly understood, and for days after she bombarded Peter with accounts of Cynthia's feats of riding and swimming, and tales of her athletic prowess at school. She was careful to explain that Cyn had not been allowed to go in for exams., but that she was frightfully clever and —Sir Everard being cited as authority—'top-hole at Maths.!' Peter was much impressed by the latter in-

formation, while remaining slightly sceptical as regards the huge scores at cricket and dare-devil high dives which Joyce recounted with too many superlatives for absolute credit.

The last day but one arrived. In the morning they flew about Cronwall in a motor-car. Peter saw nothing but Cynthia's pretty neck and head until she changed seats with him. In the afternoon the three girls bathed, and Lady Bremner, lying in the hammock, talked to Peter of what Laurence Man could do for him in the Great Company. It was like taking a nightmare seriously. He listened to the buzz of insects, and the refined, unreal voice telling him how to alter the bad dream that had not begun yet, so why, oh why, should he think of it? He wanted Cynthia. Being a polite boy he could only stay and suffer.

At length he escaped, and hurried to meet the girls. He took them by surprise and found three tomboys comparing their biceps. Three! And Cynthia's soft hair was afloat like Phyllis's and Joyce's. All the girls turned rosy and Cynthia became noticeably sedate. Yes, as dinner was to be put off until nine for that friend of Daddy's who was coming, she would like to see the sunset from the island. Phyllis did not even offer to go. With pinned-up skirts she was playing leapfrog with Joyce, Marie having been sent on ahead. Peter had had no idea that girls were ever childish. It was a valuable reminder of their humanity, their winglessness. He almost managed to see Cynthia without wings, not as the starry lady of the secret name, but as his comrade, a wholesome, natural young girl, plagued with lovers and longing for freedom. They talked of books, exchanged enthusiasms over Meredith and Leonard Merrick and Kenneth Grahame. Before reaching Tintagel Cynthia produced a comb, and crowned her sweet head with a coronal of shining hair. No one would have thought she had been playing leapfrog, too!

. . . . .

They stood on the cliff, above a tossing sea, England behind them, in front a glorious sky of apple green

merging into the faintest blue. On the horizon the golden sun was dipping towards his pathway across the sparkling waves. Flame-coloured and orange-rosy streamers flew from the ball of fire whose background was clear light. In the zenith strange shaped warrior clouds, like figures in a Japanese print, fought in shaded armour. A few stars glimmered in the duskier sky as the swift brightness faded, and the sun's rim sank over the edge of the world and his surface changed to crimson, with the waves leaping against it in a jagged line. A wind stirred the watcher's hair.

"My last!" said Peter.

"I'm sorry," she murmured, her eyes on the west. "Isn't it perfect? Phyl would be right if she called this 'heavenly.' We ought to be going back, Peter. Oh, I'm sorry that you won't be here to-morrow!"

"Are you?" he asked, as they turned reluctantly away.

"Of course I am," she said, surprised. "You musn't doubt that, please. I shall miss you fearfully."

He would rather she had not been willing to confess it. He was not altogether conscious what had prompted his question, why he so longed to cover the girl's hands with kisses and tears. Something rose in his throat, making thought difficult. He did not understand the strength of the passionate emotion which was striving to express itself. She was the sunset holiday, all joy, all beauty, so much he knew, and to leave her would be bitter as death; but he did not realise that the worship of Star had changed into the love of Cynthia. He still called her 'Star' in his secret mind. She was still Romance, and had he been frank with himself he might have declared that his feeling for Cynthia was one of friendship and that Star, his beloved, was a different person. He would have been right, but it was Cynthia whom he loved now.

"Let's climb up to the Keep, and look at the afterglow," proposed the girl.

They scrambled up the steep path at the landward end of the narrow isthmus, and gave the key of the Island

to a visitor they met upon their way, saving thus ten precious minutes. Cynthia was in front as they climbed the stone steps to the level patch of greensward surrounded by ruined walls. She moved ahead of Peter to an embrasure which from a precipice-edge overlooked the sea. Her walk was like a melody played sweetly in tune. Yes, she was a song, and a lily, and a girl to make a man's pulses quicken! But Peter was not conscious how his own were stirred. A blustering wind was blowing in gusts. Her muslin sleeves flew and fluttered, outlining her arms. She leant her elbows on the ledge and drew a long breath of delight; for now the sky was a blaze of crimson, rose, and gold, and the warriors fought on in resplendent armour, brandishing their swords among the stars. The sea rushed and tossed at the foot of the precipice, gulls were crying desolately overhead, jackdaws chattered about the cliffs. Peter came close to her. As he stood by her side their arms were touching. He felt the warmth of hers through the thin fabric. It seemed to diffuse through his whole body a glowing flood that mounted swiftly to his brain. He looked down at her clustering hair, her exquisite, clear profile, at the long white fingers propping her chin.

A struggle was going on in his mind. Interminable moments passed.

Meanwhile her thoughts flew back from the crimson tinted warriors of the sky to a frivolous thing, the gown she was to wear at dinner. The ethereal look was still upon her face, her delicate chin still uplifted, under the long lashes her eyes were heavenly bright, unconscious of him. It was a wonderful frock, a Paris model, no longer new; of which she had once been afraid because it left uncovered the lovely lines of her shoulders, the short sleeves falling upon the arms from the level of the décolletage. The colour was ivory white, the style very simple, very becoming. Mummy had fallen a victim to it because her child, wheedled by the arts of a clever saleswoman into trying it on, had looked 'so cool and delicious.' And it was not too low cut; in every way it was fascinatingly right, and dainty, and distinguished. That

was the word the saleswoman had used, transferring it to Cynthia, whose cheeks as she remembered flushed a richer rose, whose eyes sparkled with a happy light. "Mees Peto has chic, beaucoup de chic, mais mademoiselle est bien distinguée!" Cynthia was well aware that she deserved Shaun's compliment, that she had 'style' and wore her clothes as they should be worn. Phyllis had not this instinctive grace of bearing and fitness of taste and deft art in the adjustment of detail. And Phyl was always outrée, in the extreme of the fashion, from which Lady Bremner kept Cynthia carefully apart. "A girl who can look as nice as you, darling, should never dress as though she followed the fashions, but as if she availed herself of them." It was the wisest counsel.

Suddenly hot lips brushed Cynthia's cheek, and she started violently awake. Peter at the moment of self-conquest, in the very act of drawing back, had noticed the beautiful turn of the girl's head and neck. Without the slightest premeditation or knowledge of what he was doing he kissed her,—and was not amazed at the fire of her wrath. She sprang upright and faced him.

"Oh, Peter, why did you do it?" she cried, blushing scarlet.

He answered doggedly, "I love you."

"I trusted you," she said with anger. "Haven't I a single friend? I thought we were to be friends, Peter. I don't *want* lovers. Oh, it's hateful to be so lonely!"

"I'm sorry," he said, very white. "I did not mean to tell you or to do that. I don't want to give you pain, Cynthia. There's nothing I want less. I'd make you happy if I could, but I don't see quite what I can do to help you in this. I've told the truth, and I don't feel a bit as if I should change. It's no good saying that I do."

"We'd better be moving on," said she, in a quieter voice but not kindly. "It's frightfully late. I mustn't keep them waiting."

They walked slowly, Cynthia behind, along the top of the down above the combe. After the first shock of

surprise was past her anger swiftly and unaccountably faded away. Instead she felt tremulous. A sense of disappointment grew in her somewhat like that of a dreamer who has missed the happy climax of a dream through waking forgetful.

"Peter!" she said, noticing the straightness of his back and the stiffness of his broad shoulders. Laurence would have been writhing, Shaun bowed. Her heart went out a little way to him because he had taken rebuke like a soldier. But he had had no right to kiss her. She wasn't that kind of girl. As if Peter did not know it! He couldn't have been responsible, somehow, for what he did. Peter was not that kind of man.

He waited for her without eagerness, at which she felt vaguely puzzled. She had a cruel impulse which amazed her. Overcoming it, she said: "Forgive me for my rudeness. I ought to have believed at once what you told me."

She was a tall girl, but he towered above her. Cynthia breathed faster. An excitement thrilled her, as in the instant before diving from a height. Space opened, the passage of time was suspended. Her spirit hovered on the brink of some bold plunge, uncontemplated by the self she knew. She added with a breathless little laugh, "You are big, Peter. You dwarf me!"

He stepped a pace backward, and accompanied her as she walked on. "I don't regret what I did," he said. "I can't! But I promise not to do it again. You weren't rude. Cynthia could not be rude. I've been thinking things out in the last few minutes, and I know just why I love you as I do. I won't bother you! Heaps of men must have said the same things. I don't expect I could be original about your charm and your dearness. You don't mind my saying this?"

"No," said Cynthia, softly. "And the last man did not speak that way at all. He was like a starchy thing dipped into hot water! I don't believe you'll ever bother me, Peter."

"I wish I could!" he sighed, looking down at her bright head. She flushed, and for an instant was shaken

like a leaf. "I wouldn't be a girl!" he said, calmly. "Your friends plague you."

Now they descended the side of the combe to reach the stepping-stones across the stream. The incline was abrupt. They dug their heels into the green turf and advanced with precaution. Unfortunately for him she was active and did not need his help. Down below in the valley the twilight was changing into dusk, but the birds sang plaintively from dim bushes, wagtails dipped over the surface of the rippling water, a goldfinch flashed from mossy bank to mossy bank. By the edge were yellow marigolds in the grass. The forget-me-nots' blue eyes were half closed with sleep.

They walked, silent, up the long, quiet village street, like themselves deep in thought of eternal matters. The ancient house knelt brooding, its gables pointed skyward with the look of praying hands, as if some old knight crouching by the wayside. Lights began to appear in the cottages. The Wharncliffe blazed. At the gate Cynthia held out her hand. By the motion she swept away Peter's stoicism and he was conscious of a flood of bitter pain and sorrowful longing that invaded irresistibly his whole being. He pressed her hand, and dropped it and rushed up the stone path, choking back his sobs, seeing a picture which he never forgot of a bright interior and the shining mahogany dinner-table arranged with vases of white flowers, above which a white-capped housemaid was bending. The vision wavered into tears.

Cynthia entered the garden slowly, reluctant to face the lighted hall; and as she lingered Phyllis appeared round the corner of the house. Immediately a window was thrown open above the porch and Joyce, who had been watching from her bedroom in the dark, leaned out and cried triumphantly to Phyllis, "Your father's only a Banker. Mine's a Major, isn't he, Cyn?" Cynthia went in and upstairs without reply, and while mounting to her own room she heard That One hammer a reckless tattoo on Joyce's door. At all events those two had not encountered Peter nor had they seen her close. As she bathed and changed it was her one comfort. Was there

ever a girl who caused as much unhappiness as she? Except Helen of Troy, and Cynthia smiled at the idea of comparing herself with Helen. Worse, she giggled hysterically, a thing that she had not done since she was a schoolgirl.

She was down early, after all. What a comfort it was to be allowed to arrange one's own hair and do things at one's own time! She wished this holiday might never end. Here came Peter. They were the two earliest again, as they had been at Portman Square on their first meeting. How nice he looked in his evening clothes, and he was not pale now. Perhaps he would get over his feeling quite easily!

She had not time, quick as her impressions were, to consider the shock of disappointment which this thought gave her, before he was standing by the side of her chair.

"You must come out into the garden after dinner!" he said, commandingly, in a voice which was new to her. "Come when you can. I'll be watching for you, Cynthia. I must speak to you again before I go."

The entrance of Lady Bremner prevented a reply, but Cynthia never dreamed of refusing. She could trust poor Peter not to hurt her as Laurence had done, and it was so very peaceful and nice to be ordered about by him! It brought her something oddly like happiness. As the meal dragged to a close, Cynthia wondered why. She was usually irritated by any attempt to control her actions, and had had several angry little disputes with Shaun because he, persistently in certain moods, instructed her as to what she was to do or not to do. Disputes over trivial matters. She was trying to analyse the difference between Peter and Shaun, when Lady Bremner gave the signal to rise.

In the midst of an indictment of the Home Rule Bill by the guest of the evening Peter heard her singing in the drawing-room. He excused himself as soon as he could and went upstairs. She sang *Der Nussbaum*, not perfectly but with a sweet, round voice. Lady Bremner played the difficult accompaniment with unexpected skill. She would not stay at the piano when Cynthia

had finished, so the latter chose a volume of Beethoven and played the *Waldstein.* She was uplifted, and did well. Lady Bremner then asked for the *Pastoral,* while Phyllis demanded the *Appassionata.* The arrival of the two men prevented the playing of either, for 'Daddy's friend' wanted "that pretty thing," which proved to be *In the Shadows.*

The music had clarified Peter's mind and confirmed his intention. The evening seemed endless, yet he went through its varied incidents patiently, and at last found himself in the cool verandah, listening to the stridulation of the grasshoppers and starting with beating heart whenever he thought he heard a footstep within. He had faced himself; and the call of his blood to obstinate battle against odds had sounded within him; he told himself, unafraid, that he meant to marry Cynthia Bremner. The thought had not occurred to him as the wildest possibility when he entered his bedroom a few hours ago. Now he said humbly that he intended to have a try. If he found he was hurting her he would not go on, that was definite. What he would do, if he made progress, was vague in his mind, remote, and could be decided when the occasion came. He was strung to an entire concentration. His past was a dream. He stood awakened. He was a man.

She came to him; like a tall lily, in the dusk of the verandah. Her head was hooded in a filmy scarf of the colour of the moonlight flooding the garden. It was swathed around her shoulders, and the ends twisted about her forearms, and as she stepped forth into the world of glamour he caught sight of her smooth, white elbows peeping. He followed without a word, and she led him down rose-trellised paths, through the door into the field.

The low stone hedges made lines of shadow upon the argent plain, and the uplands swept gloriously to a sky of countless stars among which hung the great, solemn moon in full circle. The air was mild and smelt sweet of hay. Far distant, the sea whispered a lullaby to the night; bats flitted, and their thin cries were like moon-

shine made audible, voicing the magic of the pale radiance that streamed on the wold. Dewdrops glistened underfoot.

And now she stopped, while still hidden from the windows of the house by the fence; and the feathery edge of the veil discarded by her lay on the one bare shoulder and slipped from the other, the nearer to Peter. O'ertopping her, he looked at her flower-poised head and the lovely line from the grace of her neck to her symmetrical, slender shoulder, curving adorably over the smooth roundness to the firm upper arm. She emerged, snowy, from the clasp of her ivory gown. The silver moonlight gleamed on her young beauty. The pink carnations at her breast were reflected in her cheeks and lips. The long lashes dropped over the mystery of her eyes as he passed by and faced her.

Phyllis had worn a scarlet poinsettia against her white skin, in the same nook where Cynthia's dear carnations nestled; and she had invited him to smell the flowers, ready to dart away. Peter would have given a year of his life to be asked that by Cynthia in gentle surrender. The throwing back of the wrap would have been coquetry in Phyllis. He did not misread the girl he loved, whose gesture was instinctive, symbol of her resolve to bestow truth as well as demand it.

"What is it, Peter?" asked Cynthia. He could see the swift rise and fall of her bosom. The simple question touched him like a caress, for she had trusted him so greatly in coming!

"Just to say this," he answered. "I care for you, Cynthia. I want you. I believe that it is real love which I feel, not a passing attraction. I wish you to know it because of the difference it makes. I did not insult you on the cliff. I was irresistibly drawn to do what I did. It happened because I did not know, and it shan't happen again. Will you forgive me, please, Cynthia?"

"I do forgive you," she whispered. "I did before."

"That's good!" he cried starward, yet not so loud as to be overheard by a loiterer in the garden. A passion

of relief shook him. "Thank you," he said from the bottom of his heart. And then he hung his head, abashed by her generosity. And spied the dewdrops glistening in the grass at her feet. Her satin slippers were streaked with damp. "Cynthia, you must go in," he said, speaking masterfully again, so that she felt a little thrill of joy. It gave her happiness to acquiesce in the orders of this man whom she did not love. She turned obediently and went, passing away like music, fading into a memory of loveliness, leaving the night dark.

. . . . .

"It's over," Peter said aloud. He was thinking of his holiday. His travail had only just begun.

XIV

THE 'bus he had descended from plunged forward, and the portico of the offices of the Great Company frowned above Peter, already depressed by the roar and rattle of the City streets and the pallid, elbowing throng of black-coated clerks, who poured out of the tube entrance opposite and traversed the narrow thoroughfare in all directions and at every variety of pace. The familiar sight took him back into a world from which it was difficult to realise he had ever been away. While the image of Cynthia slipped into his under-mind and Cornwall faded from memory, London and the Company resumed him. The scent of the night flowers could not fight against the stale smell of petrol, the murmur of the sea was drowned in the thunder of traffic, cliff walls gave place to drab, smoke-stained architecture on either hand, and NINE sounded triumphantly from the clock tower, as Peter passed the commissionaire and entered the courtyard at a run.

His welcome was a hasty cry of, "Hullo, Middleton! you'll be late," from a passing High Official who was well-disposed to him, and a cold stare from a hurrying junior whose bundle of papers and air of confident superiority proclaimed him to be on the staff of either Laurence Man or the Managing Director. Peter dived into the gloomy doorway on the right, which had once —while overtime was being worked—been inscribed by a reckless spirit with Dante's line, *Lasciate ogni speranza voi ch'entrate,* in red chalk. The inscription escaped notice in the dark, but next morning there were furious attempts to discover the culprit, who was ultimately betrayed and dismissed. Laurence had been called upon by the Managing Director to translate the phrase, which resulted in a most comical scene!

"Abandon hope, all ye who enter here!" Peter had arrived, glowingly determined to make the best of his unpromising employment and to wring success and promotion from the hands of fate at the earliest possible moment. The sight of a High Official standing over the signing-on book, beaked like a bird of prey, ready to snatch it the instant the five minutes of grace were up, damped his enthusiasm horribly. He knew that Mr. Lemon had greeted those who came before the clock struck with a "Good morning," even though they were about to idle away the next quarter of an hour; while for him, returned from leave and eager to put his back into the work, there was only a sidelong glance from narrowed eyes, because he was two minutes late. And old Lemon never did anything himself except get chaps into trouble!

Thank goodness, he was sent across to Brown! The sight of his kindly, clean-shaven face and dim blue eyes was welcome as that of a friend, for Mr. Brown was one of the few popular High Officials in Laurence Man's department. He was an able, truly religious man, courteous and just in all his dealings, a Quaker, who always considered before he spoke, and enunciated with precise, clipping care.

"Good morn-ing! I hope you enjoyed your leave, Mid-dleton."

"Thank you, sir, I did." Enjoy! Does a man enjoy Heaven? Well, after all, it was the only available word. "How are the butterflies getting on?"

Mr. Brown was an enthusiastic breeder of rare English butterflies, which he was said to release in Hyde Park at dead of night, attired (Mr. Brown, not the butterflies!) in purple silk pyjamas.

"Excell-ently, thanks! Will you be good enough to assist Blotter and Sem-ple?"

About eleven o'clock Peter had time to look round him, and did so. It was safe under Brown to do this, although the incorrigible Blotter insisted on pretending to work when there was no work to be done, in case of the unexpected entry of a High Official. "You never

know your luck with them Highos," he was reported to have said when he first entered the service, from which arose his malicious nickname of "Old Them," corrupted to "Old Clem" or "Clement," which most fellows now believed to be his Christian name.

"Married the pretty daughter yet?" inquired Semple, loudly.

"Whose pretty daughter?" grunted Blotter, without looking up.

"I told him to take plenty of shirts, and then she'd ——— well fall in love with him."

Peter knew better than to show signs of anger. Why, oh why, had he given this animal credit for any of the instincts of a gentleman?

"Be quiet, you low blackguard," he said genially. "Did I tread upon your foot? I'm sorry. I hope it hurt. Would you like a fight afterwards?"

"Are you mad, you ——— fool?" demanded Semple, staring.

"Don't you swear at me!" said Peter, coldly. "I won't have it. You were quite right about the clothes, Semple; I needed everything I took."

Blotter leaped up to ask for work, although he knew none had come in, and this changed the subject. Semple turned on him.

"It's no use sucking up to Brown, old ———!" he observed. "He knows you!"

"He knows a good man, then!" retorted Blotter, complacently.

"Oh my god! Good gargoyle, you mean! If you dressed up as a ——— butterfly he might take some notice of you, and then your ——— face would spoil it."

"How did I stand this filthy swearing?" thought Peter. "Old Semple only knows two words, and if I can't stick them, how the deuce shall I put up with the really dirty talk of Kilworth and Pulley? There I go myself! I'd never have talked of the deuce at—— I won't think the name here. But it's a serious matter, for one's got to enjoy dirt to be comfortable in this

infernal place. I suppose I'll become accustomed to it again, but I'm bothered if I'll ever let myself like it."

"Heard Kilworth's latest limerick?" inquired Semple. "Oh, ———! Here's the work."

At lunch Peter collected a table-full of men whom he liked, and heard the news. The most popular chap in the Office had gone round telling a funny story about a goat and no one could find out what the joke was, although he seemed to see it quite plainly himself. Everybody in the building had made an excuse to come and ask for that yarn! . . . There was a rumour that the Managing Director was thinking of retiring to a quieter place on the Board. Half the table were backing Laurence Man to get his place. . . . The Directors had promoted young Mainwaring, whom Peter had met in the Courtyard, though there were fifteen men senior to him, of whom five at least were better clerks. The table agreed that Peter was one of the five. . . . Blotter would probably get the next vacancy in Department B. "If so that's an end to your chances of quick promotion, Middleton. Well, we've all seen these lads with interest pass over our heads. You're in good company, old boy!"

One of the New Entrants, or News as they were called in office slang, was delightfully green. O'Brien, who lived in the country—"where all the decent sorts live: what the deuce makes you dig in London, Peter?"—had told him how on the way to the station he had tripped over a nest of field-mice, containing three hundred and sixty-five young ones. Field-mice, O'Brien had explained with gravity, are very prolific. And the mother had run at him and bitten him in the heel through a stout walking boot, and did the New think he was in danger of hydrophobia? The New had actually consulted old Lemon—"Isn't that man a swine, Peter? Always getting some poor devil into a row,"—and the Old 'Un had said gruffly, "Good job if he does get it. Tell him I said so. Don't come to me with silly questions. Stupid young ass!" He was right for once.

After lunch Peter went out with a message, which he was ordered to deliver at a number of addresses. He

came into Cheapside and saluted the Church, dingy in the afternoon sunshine, with Gog and Magog over its projecting clock. The famous Bow-bells were pealing; entitling Cockneys. Peter was one of the few who knew that St. Mary-le-Bow derives its name from the arches of its old crypt. Down Queen Street he walked at a swift pace, past Jones and Evans' Bookshop where duty forbade him to linger, into the dulness of Queen Victoria Street, only partially redeemed by its branch of Mudie's; then on to the civic centre of London, where the Bank and the Mansion House and the Royal Exchange gloom at one another across the crowding traffic. The courts and alleys of Cornhill led him to heavy Lombard Street, from which he gladly emerged, and passed Leadenhall Market into the sunshine of Bishopsgate, and turned backward through Adam's Court to the Stock Exchange, and pushed through Throgmorton Street, swarming with hatless clerks. In Lothbury he bought chocolate from the poet Shepperley, and hurried on to the mellow calm of the Guildhall, within sight of which he ended his mission; and so strolled regretfully officeward through the hot, narrow streets, feeling as though the City had welcomed him again and claimed him as her own.

He had deliberately put aside all thought of Cynthia until he should be on the 'bus homeward-bound in the cool of the evening. While gulping his tea at six o'clock, listening to the curiously mingled clatter and hush of a big restaurant, he kept strictly to his resolve. No sound of the sea intruded. The listless attendant did not break a spell as she slanted her indifferent head to take his order, nor when she brought him cake instead of bread did he fail to point out the error. "O-ah!" she said. "Sorry!" And reached out a perfunctory hand. "Thanks, I'll keep it," Peter told her, remembering she might be tired as well as haughty. . . . He paid at the desk, pushed back the swing-door, and sniffed the warm, rubbery smell of the City street. An instant later he was on his 'bus, plunged into memories and calculations.

St. Paul's Cathedral loomed, and swung past. He was getting £135 a year and Cynthia probably spent that on

clothes alone. He liked her best in white, he thought. He was visioning her in white as the 'bus racketed under dark Ludgate Bridge. It crossed the Circus with the favouring stream of traffic and drew to a standstill at the bottom of Fleet Street. Confound that man, Blotter! It was certainly possible that he would be promoted above Peter's head. And yet Blotter did not do nearly as much work, and was not more accurate, although he might appear so through his artful avoidance of posts of danger. That was the result of judging a man on negative grounds, according to the smallness of number of the mistakes recorded against him in that infernal book they kept in Department A. It was all a kind of lottery whether Peter were promoted or sacked. Ha—, no, *not* hang it all, but bother! Why, how many hundreds of mistakes of young Mainwaring's had not he himself picked up as checker! If only one of those had slipped through, Lordly Laurence would have cursed as though it were the sole error which had been made by the staff of the Great Company for years. But he—Peter—had no right to complain! Why, every one of the bloomers he had made immediately before going on leave had been discovered before it reached a Higho. And he'd made a thundering lot and deserved to be properly told off! Here was the Griffin of Temple Bar, and there were the appropriate Law Courts; Peter proceeded to talk to himself severely.

Work slow; copperplate handwriting; check everything twice; let the public wait. Those were to be his mottoes for the future. "Middleton is a most reliable man," in unctuous tones, must replace, "He's a quick worker. Give it to him to do. Here, Middleton! Don't make any mistakes and let yourself in for trouble, but get this done sharp. The people are waiting."

Supposing it did, what had he to hope for, beyond the sight of St. Clement Dane's every evening on his way home from the Office? Was there any other thoroughfare in the world, he wondered, with two churches in the middle of the street within a few hundred yards of each other? He liked St. Mary's the better of the two. It

passed, and the Gaiety Theatre rushed towards him. If he could get into Department A he would soon be receiving £180 a year, and might rise to £800 before he retired. Laurence Man must be getting that now, and *he* had a very good chance of becoming Managing Director. There were undoubtedly prospects in Department A. But without interest had Peter any reasonable hope of being selected for that favoured spot? The Bremners were not the kind of people—he was glad to think—who would ask Man to push him forward.

The Savoy and the Cecil taunted Peter by reminding him of the wealth in the world. He would like to give a supper at the Savoy to Cynthia and Alan and Miss Taliesin. It seemed to him an extraordinary thing that he had never known before how lovely could be a girl's arms. Even in long sleeves her dear slender wrists fascinated him. . . . But this was not business. No, he must face the prospect of staying in his own office and see how that worked out. When he arrived at the age of thirty he might be getting £200 a year, and might reach £350 before he retired. My word! Could he ask Cynthia Rosemary Bremner to wait six years and then share an income of £200? It would not be fair! Nelson stooped from his Monument to whisper that a Middleton could not do such a thing. Then was he to give her up? Something said aloud in his heart: "You are strong enough. You are not a coward. But I shall not let you." He started violently, and the typist who shared the front seat of the 'bus glanced at him apprehensively. "A nice-looking boy," she thought, relieved. "He must have seen a girl he knew on the pavement there. I wish I had a nice boy like him to take me out!"

The voice had been objective and impersonal, as if Fate had spoken. For the time Peter gave up the idea of renunciation, and devoted himself to practical matters. Cockspur Street with its models of steamships in the Shipping Companies' Offices, His Majesty's Theatre, Piccadilly Circus, Piccadilly itself, the dried meadow beauty of the Green Park, the solid row of clubs and mansions facing it, Hyde Park Corner and Knightsbridge

fled by like phantoms of a dream, while he endeavoured to work out a budget for two people with £200 a year. It included many day dresses and evening frocks for Cynthia. "What on earth do girls pay for their clothes? I must look in the shop-windows!" Ignorant Peter! Lady Bremner does not go to the shop-windows for garments for Rosemary. The flap of the budget would not close. In passing the hideous Knightsbridge Barracks it flew open and showed the financier that he had forgotten servants for his small house and also the cost of lighting. Was it certain he could clothe himself on £4 a year, and subsist on sandwiches for lunch? Peter was a tall man with a tall appetite. The dusty green of Hyde Park, soft and cool in the summer evening haze, glided by with noiseless, smooth flow of railings and trees. People whizzed by in hooting landaulets on their way to dinner. The hoods of the cars were down, and most of the women and girls were wearing light colours. With a flash of white they were gone. The outlines of the Albert Hall were sharp against the rosy sky. The 'bus gathered speed down the long incline. Still Peter wrestled with his figures. He strove against their tendency to expand the moment the grip of his will was removed. After settling the allowance for housekeeping at ten shillings each per week ("St. Mary Abbot's? That's rather a church for weddings!") he flew down the Kensington Road ("Campden Hill would be the jolliest place, or Holland Park. Rent makes them impossible, I suppose"), and came to the conclusion that for fifteen shillings apiece two people ought to do themselves fairly decently. "That throws the whole thing out. I said ten just now!" He wrestled with his budget all the way to Hammersmith in a fury of concentration, but it declined to reclose. "After all, it's only an estimate," he thought, dismounting from the 'bus in front of the District station. The Broadway was bustling. Shabby, sordid people crowded along the pavements, each intent on his or her particular shopping. The door of a public-house swung-to, driving into the street a waft of hot, alcoholic air, "The sea!" longed Peter. "The salt

briny smell and green combers, and Cynthia standing close, silent and loving it too." He reached his lodgings, which were in a tall, Georgian, shabby-genteel house in a row of others exactly similar, and climbed flights of stairs to his little sitting-room with its faded red curtains, and its one comfortable chair, and its horsehair monstrosity of a sofa, and the two photographs on the bare mantelpiece, and the Dürer engravings on the walls amongst the cheap oleographs of his landlady's fancy. The windows were wide open, and the room was cool. Peter crossed to the fireplace and looked at the photographs one after the other. What would his father say? He would say in his kind, sad voice, "My boy, she does not love you yet. Let her alone. It is hard to see the woman you care for pining in poverty." Cynthia, without her sea breezes, and her many books, and her beautiful clinging gowns. Cynthia in a blouse and skirt, her oldest, doing the cooking! "Why not?" asked the face of the mother whom he had never seen. "If she loved you, little son of mine, she would be glad and proud to work for you." His mother had sweet eyes. She had followed her husband over all the world, suffered many a hardship with him; perhaps had died because she would not leave him. . . .

The voice which had spoken before in Peter's heart said clearly and distinctly, "I shall not let you give her up." He felt a cold shudder run down his spine and his hair seemed to lift, his pulses to stand still. The voice said, more faintly, "She is yours." He came to himself, and turning, went into the bedroom and fell upon his knees.

XV

A MONTH later, having neither written to nor heard news of Cynthia in the meantime, Peter descended from his 'bus in the Haymarket and turned up Panton Street. He had obtained Shaun James's number from *Who's Who,* and in a few moments was ringing a bell above a plate marked with the novelist's name at a door beside a fruiterer's shop. A buxom, elderly woman came out of the shop and, seeing Peter standing before the separate entrance to the upper premises, went back again after bidding him a respectful, "Good evening, sir." Peter liked her face. Shaun opened the door while Peter was watching her hang row after row of bananas on hooks in the ceiling of the little room.

"They look after me," said Shaun. "Do it very well. Come in, please, Middleton. I'm delighted to see you. I was expecting you soon. Forgive my leading the way up these dark stairs. Mind your head at the turn. People over five foot ten bump their heads most painfully there, I'm told."

Peter followed, astonished, and was taken into a large, dark sitting-room on the second floor. The well-worn furniture was upholstered in green, and the carpet, which was very thick and warm, had once been purple but had now faded almost to the hue of lavender. A wide writing-table stood in one of the windows, with a neat pile of manuscript upon it, also some ragged blotting-paper, and a vase of yellow gaillardias. "A present from downstairs," explained Shaun, who seemed to have the power of reading his guest's thoughts. "They give me flowers daily. Take the big chair unless you'd rather wander round and look at the pictures. I'm lucky in knowing chaps who paint, and most of these sketches are really

good. You don't smoke a pipe, do you? Then take one of these cigarettes, if you don't mind Virginian. Odd, you look the kind of man who would swear by a pipe. I'll have mine, I think. That's an Orpen you are in front of now. Shame to hang it in such a bad light, isn't it? But it's too big for anywhere else in the room."

"It's awfully fine," said Peter, reverently. The tone with which he spoke made the novelist regard him, an interested look in his sharp, blue eyes.

"You know, then——" he was beginning, when Peter turned, and lowering himself into the big arm-chair, said abruptly: "Forgive me if I'm rude, Mr. James, but would you mind saying why you were expecting me to come?"

"Call me James, and bother the Mr.!" said the kind voice, veiled as though its owner were considering. "Anyone Miss Bremner likes is a friend of mine if he cares to be. I might say that I thought she would ask you to call on me, but if I did it wouldn't be wholly ingenuous. I hoped that you liked me well enough to come and ask my advice. Draw any or no conclusions as you please, Middleton, but when I saw you on the doorstep I knew you had come for a definite purpose. I am glad to see you in any case. Now shall we discuss the horse?"

"The horse?" repeated Peter, too nervous to be quick of apprehension.

"A sagacious animal, with a leg at each corner. 'Ce noble et fougueux animal,' says Buffon, who must not be confounded with buffoon. Not that you'd do that!"

"No, don't lets! I did come for a reason. I wouldn't have ventured to without, although I should have wanted to tremendously. I came to ask you a question."

The light had grown dimmer in the last few moments, but Peter had a fleeting impression that Shaun smiled. "I do not believe you'd ask what I should not want to answer, Middleton."

Peter recollected himself. "I was awfully sorry to

hear what called you away from Tintagel. Only I couldn't write."

"Thank you. She was old and not sorry to go. Death, if we trust our hopes, cannot be a sad thing for the people who die. In my mother's case an old servant is left most lonely." Shaun would not claim sorrow for himself, feeling that he had not the right, as he had left the dead 'most lonely' during her lifetime. If Middleton thought him heartless—well, he deserved it!

Peter found it difficult now to put his question.

"I cannot conjecture with any certainty what you are going to ask me. Please be quite frank," said Shaun, leaning back to tap his pipe on the bars of the grate.

Peter looked up. "It seems impertinent now that I'm actually here," he said, slowly, "but you've been very kind, so I will ask you whether there is any chance of your marrying Miss Bremner. I don't mean probability. It would be frightful cheek to make inquiries about that. If you'd answer the question just as it stands it would be very generous of you."

"There is no chance whatever," said Shaun. "Put that idea out of your head entirely. She never wished me to be anything but a friend, and I am no longer trying to be. That is categorical."

"Thank you," said Peter, rising. He looked happier, but still a trifle perplexed, and his face, coming into the light, looked pale, as though he had lain awake at nights. So thought Shaun, who did not move.

"You have found out, almost to your own surprise, that you love her in the true sense of the word," he asserted quietly. "I am glad, and should like to help you. I imagine you are troubled by various honourable scruples, the nature of which I may say with frankness that it is not difficult to guess! If you would like to talk them out with some one else who cares very greatly for her welfare, please believe that I am your friend."

"It is good of you," said Peter, with emphasis, remaining standing. "There's something more in my mind which I've got to tell you now before you allow me to

be friends. I came here undecided whether to say it, and it's only fair to have things out. It's worse cheek than ever, this, but I honestly don't think I'm considering anyone but her, really. She's so tremendously influenced by you, you see. I can't help wondering whether she would marry any one at all while she's got your friendship; she compares people with you so, in her mind, I mean. Even if she met a man who understood things and people the way you do, he couldn't start by knowing her so well. . . . You do see, don't you?"

"I understand you to suggest that I give her up altogether?" asked Shaun, in a dry tone.

"No," said Peter, "I'm not so bad as that. Only it was in my mind, and I thought it fair to tell you since you were being so kind to me."

"I was the same variety of ass as you, once!" exclaimed Shaun, springing up. "Upon my soul, Peter, I'm glad to be reminded of it! Sit you right down, and light up, while I go and tell them you are staying to dinner. It's got to be. Don't say a word now. I've set my heart on it!"

Peter felt very shy when he found himself alone in the great man's room. There was a glow and warmth within him, such as a man feels who has found something unaccountably beautiful of which he but half understands the value. He admired Shaun James so artlessly, and it seemed so impossible that James should be interested in him in return.

In a moment the novelist came back. "Miss Bremner, whom we'd better call Cynthia now that we're friends, is I think in only the very slightest danger of being monopolised by me. I've been alive from the beginning to the risk you point out, and I've taken careful precautions to eliminate unconscious romanticism—if you'll forgive a clumsy phrase. A short time ago I proved my success." He made a grimace of pain. "Merciful Providence did not make me the kind of artist who loves to dominate young girls under a pretence of education. Now you fire ahead with your story."

Peter began. At first he was nervous, and involved

his narrative by stopping to explain bits of psychology which were transparently simple to Shaun. Sometimes he puzzled himself in the process. "The boy is innocent enough!" thought Shaun. "If I could remember the time when I was as young as this, I'd make a book of it." But when dinner was brought in and the lights were turned on, Peter grew in courage and told his story well, helped by the ingenious questions of his host.

"By the way," warned Shaun, suddenly, "you are trusting me a good deal. Don't trust any other literary man in the world. We batten on confidences. I promise I'll try not to use what you're telling me."

Peter looked rather alarmed. "Go on," said Shaun. "It's all right." He only interrupted once more. Then he asked, "Do you sketch? You talk as though you saw colour and mass uncommonly clearly." Peter came from the Keep of Tintagel with reluctance. Shaun could almost see the image of Cynthia fading from before his eyes. "Don't answer. Go on," he said hastily.

They were seated in big chairs by a window in the hot August dusk. Their own narrow thoroughfare was silent. Coventry Street roared at the back of them, Leicester Square on their one side, the Haymarket on their other; but from the south the noise of Cockspur Street and Trafalgar Square was dulled by distance and intervening houses to a steady hum of traffic. The sky was grey, wreathed with dim clouds and striped with thin streaks of rising smoke. When he had finished Peter sat looking up at it, wondering whether it was clear and bright for Cynthia wherever she might be.

"I don't pay much attention to that Inner Voice of yours," said Shaun, at last. "It's probably a trick of the subconscious self, and most lovers believe the girl they love is theirs. I speak of it first in order to get it out of the way. I know you were not over-impressed. Your financial position we'll discuss presently. It may not be so bad as you think. On the point of honour I agree with you, Peter. You had not any right to make love to Cynthia Bremner. No more had I, and we are a pair of knaves."

Peter's heart sank, changing into a lump of lead.

"The reason why I expected you, and why I encouraged you to discuss the matter when you came, is this," explained Shaun. "As you've no doubt guessed, Cynthia wrote me some account of what happened on your last evening at Tintagel. She was very brief, and from what she said and did not say—more particularly the latter—I gathered you had made an impression on her which—well, we'll say which differed from what I, for example, have achieved. She seemed to be thinking of you with a shyness new in my experience of Cynthia, who does not lack self-confidence as a rule and is accustomed to dismissing men. I do not mean she is hard-hearted. That she could never be. Nor has she learnt how to deal with people who rave and throw themselves at her feet. But she has probably refused twenty or thirty ordinary enough young fellows and a few extraordinary elderly ones also, all of whom have taken her refusal normally. She has told me about five or six and sometimes asked my advice. You must remember I know her well, Peter."

Peter's heart was a flame of fire. "What do you think, then?" he managed to blurt out.

"I thought no more than I have said. Now, having heard everything from you, I am inclined to believe that she's beginning to care for you, unknown to herself. That is my impression. Are you all right? It's hot in this room, isn't it?"

"Yes, thanks," said Peter, with set face.

"Remember literary people are always cocksure when it's a question of human nature. I'm not infallible. I only give you my impression. At the same time I've weighed the probable consequences of saying what I do say. I'm not speaking lightly, as you may guess. Tell me all over again about your prospects, will you? And give me some details of your work."

Shaun listened awhile, and said, "Is that the Laurence Man who was at Tintagel? He is unlikely to be friendly to you."

"He's not very popular," answered Peter vaguely.

Presently Shaun summed up. "Secret reports on staff are the devil, always. You would have been much better off in the Government Service. It seems to me, Peter, you were born too late. The rules under which you are working date from a time when the Directors could afford to employ plenty of men and treat them well. The staff was therefore selected with a view to the maintenance of the dignity of the Company in the eyes of the public, and gentlemen were preferred. Now the Board is inclined to grudge the men their salary and yet lacks the moral courage to introduce cheap labour in a straightforward way. Instead it goes in for petty economy and deferring promotions and other devices which create ill-feeling between employers and employed. Say that again about handwriting. I don't understand. To select men for the most important office because they write not only clearly but in a special style approved by the Company, seems to me merely fantastic."

"It is, now that all the letters out are typewritten," said Peter. "The Highos get attacks of madness about handwriting. I've been in the place six years, and I've just had to send in a 'test,' an example of my writing. I've had lessons and altered it once to suit them already. Usually, asking for a test means that they are looking for an excuse to get a man into trouble, but it can't be that in my case."

"Why not?" asked Shaun.

"I know I'm above the average at my job," answered Peter.

Shaun looked serious. "Do you think that Man likes you?"

"No," said Peter, and he suddenly recollected the incident at the Bremners' dinner-party, when he had admitted before his Chief that he did not love his employment. "No, I suppose he doesn't!"

"Well!" said Shaun drily, "I make a deduction."

"Really it can't be that," exclaimed Peter.

"I hope it isn't! Could it mean promotion by any chance?"

"Now, that isn't the way they do things. I should

have been given a hint when the test was asked for. And several other men had to send them in as well."

"Were they good men at their job?"

"Some good, some bad. Really, I don't expect to hear any more of it!"

"It may be only my professional eye looking ahead for a melodramatic incident, Peter. But truth is stranger than fiction, and life often more sensational than a cinema-play. Don't forget, and take care. Now I'm going to turn you out, for a reason that I know you'll understand and sympathise with. I've got a day's writing to do to-morrow and must go to bed early as a matter of duty, against my inclination."

Peter understood and said so. He got up, feeling dazed, as from a long night's tossing, and immensely tired. Many waves of emotion had broken upon him in the last four hours, excitement had followed excitement. Everything had appeared normal and simple while it was happening, and was so in fact, but the cumulative effect was not ordinary. An extremely sensitive nervous system, such as most creative artists possess, would have undergone reaction and its owner been a prey to a horrible melancholy of the remainder of the night, but Peter was of tougher fibre. He merely became conscious of fatigue, and felt he must put off his decision until next morning. He still thought that to give Cynthia up lay in his power and that it might prove to be his duty.

The deep-tinted room and the glorious paintings on the walls were strangely familiar to Peter as he went out. He seemed to have lived years with them, happy years which had glided by with swiftness. It was startling to descend the dark, unknown staircase, and to hear Shaun's steps tapping behind. The noise the pair of them made on the uncarpeted boards racketed through the whole house. "I'm very rarely in late!" said Shaun's voice, a sound that Peter was accustomed to and loved. Was it possible that he had scarcely known Shaun a few hours ago? Surely there was never a time when he did not know and love this friend.

"You've been frightfully decent to me," he said, impulsively, at the street door.

"I believe I have . . ." said Shaun. "You'll need kindness before you are through with things, young Peter. You've a hard row to hoe." He was silent a moment, and added with gravity, "If Cynthia has begun to care for you I should have wronged her by acting otherwise. That is what my knowledge of humanity and my religion tell me, and I care not sixpence for any one else's."

"You still think she does?" said Peter, a tide of happiness rising in him.

"I do."

The tide reached its height. Youth triumphed. In all the world there could not be more joy than was rioting in Peter.

"Yes," went on Shaun, his fingers on the handle of the door, face in shadow. "But she'd have married me out of pity, in the long run; and your Chief several times came near to controlling her!"

"Laurence Man!" repeated Peter, in horror.

Shaun laughed. "You don't know how comparatively easy it is to get a certain influence over a sheltered girl. Cynthia's human, has weaknesses, little faults of vanity, and she is not unpassionate, which you may thank Heaven for! The ladies are very real, Peter, different from men and yet oddly similar; better in some ways, falling short in others. They wear no halo, nor does their womanhood give them any knowledge that the artist has not got. Love Cynthia and make a comrade of her. Worship no one but God. That's my advice to you. And Peter! Though she may love you, remember you may not find it easy to convince her of it. Good night!" He drew back and closed the door.

Next day in the afternoon Peter received a post-card which said: *Returns fortnight. Come soon, take counsel.* It was signed *S. J.*

XVI

During the weeks that followed Peter's departure Cynthia had not once given herself to introspection. She had been mountain-climbing in Wales; and healthy fatigue in the evening and very early rising in the morning helped her to postpone the reckoning which she knew she must eventually have with herself. Her last impression at Tintagel, which she had left soon after Peter, was the consciousness of being virginally shy of the whole race of men. She felt herself in flight from these hunters, and took refuge in a household of girls with a sensation of positive relief. Laurence was the trapper and tamer, even Shaun wished to put friendship in a cage. Peter she would not consider, although it was he before whom her spirit fled, he who had made the wild part of her nature know that one day it would submit. She had trusted unaware to her maiden fleetness; and had he approached in the interval while she was quivering with the first apprehension of capture that she had ever felt, it would have been the worse for him, for she would have turned and struck at him blindly.

But Peter did not write, and in time her mood relaxed. After all he would be a friend, and what was there better? He had said he was sorry, and been forgiven. She need not bother about analysis while Cader Idris remained to be conquered. Presently she began almost to resent his not writing. Phyllis did Peter a disservice here by inquiring from an illegible address in Norway, *How is Peter Middleton?* "The first letter I've had from Phyl in my life," thought Cynthia, flushed and indignant, "and if she'd wanted to know she'd certainly have asked him herself! I won't be teased by

Phyllis Peto!" Her hostesses found her in a prickly mood that day, and at night she made a tour of all their bedrooms to beg for pardon.

The beginning of September found Cynthia back in London, waiting for her mother, whom she was to take to Brittany. Lady Bremner lingered in the north a week after the date she was due to come home; and Cynthia, who had not informed Shaun of the shortness of her stay, partly because she took it for granted that he would telephone on her arrival, partly because she would not be sorry if she missed him, received the announcement of his name on a Sunday afternoon with mixed emotions. "I do hope he won't want to discuss Peter," flashed into her mind as she rose, and was lost in the gladness of seeing him; but the sight of Peter behind was a shock and she believed with vexation that she had turned white and stared. "Jackson did not announce you, Peter," she said, smiling, "but you are very welcome!"

"My fault," said Shaun. "I told her, 'Oh, if you say Mr. James!' She's new, isn't she?"

His eyes had dwelt for a moment on her face. "Oh, Shaun!" she thought reproachfully, guessing the trap he had set for her.

"Yes, she's new, and a good parlourmaid. Don't you think she's pretty, Peter?"—"Cynthia, you cat!" being her internal comment on Peter's look of surprise.

"I suppose she is," he replied, simply. "I didn't notice."

Shaun would have liked to add, "And Middleton doesn't generally fail to observe charm or beauty," but he knew Cynthia and did not underrate her cleverness. She was looking faintly puzzled, which probably meant that she was not. "A person in a canary-coloured tail coat with brass buttons and a very fine maroon waistcoat left this parcel at my rooms the other day," he said. She had not noticed that he was carrying anything in his hand.

"Please sit down. . . . It's Laurence Man's writing, Shaun!"

"What I expected!" said Shaun, continuing coolly,

"Rather a neat dodge sending his stuff by me, Cynthia. Are you impressed by his supersubtle tact?" ("I don't think that's in too bad taste for me," he thought. "Peter can be relied on to feel uncomfortable. If only he'll look it, they'll be united against me; and also he'll get a chance to show his loyalty.")

He did. Cynthia was angry. "Peter doesn't understand," she said. "It isn't fair to him. You oughtn't to talk secrets before Peter." Shaun thought sadly, "She likes calling him by his name. I've never heard her say 'Shaun' in just that tone."

"James can't say anything wrong," said Peter. "Especially if it's against Laurence Man."

"A dear boy!" commented Shaun, aloud. "He really means it. Peter is the only living individual who has called on an author in his den without going away disillusioned. The Orpen dazzled him, Cynthia. And here comes tea."

Peter took his leave early; 'soon enough to be missed' had been his instructions, which he interpreted modestly. When they were left alone, "It's good to see you back," said Shaun to Cynthia. His tone was not that of a lover, which rejoiced her. She wondered whether it was due to the death of his mother, guessing near to the truth without divining it exactly. "If you had not been in time to see her before she died," she said with sudden emotion, "I should have hated myself for ever! It was horrible of me to bring you away just then."

"Don't, dear! If I'd arrived sooner, Mother and I would only have quarrelled. It sounds a brutal thing to say, but it's probably the truth, and God knows I say it without the smallest feeling of bitterness. Hadn't Laurence Man your address, or is this a touching proof of his absence of jealousy, as I suggested?"

"Both, I daresay," replied Cynthia, carelessly. "That's all right," thought Shaun, and questioned her about the books she had been reading. They were few.

"Your losing of my firstborn on Cader Idris is what

Joyce would call 'a bit thick,' " he said. "Is it an easy mountain, Cynthia?"

"Not the way we went! We were out for rock-climbing. They are awfully sporting girls."

He had scarcely listened and now he rose to depart. "One way or the other you won't find Peter Middleton worry you," he assured her with intentional vagueness. "He seems to me a reliable boy, and I've grown to like him. You did not mind my bringing him, did you? The irony of it appealed to me, and you said you'd forgiven him."

Blue eyes met grey; and the grey were sweet and clouded, but the gaze of the blue was clear.

"It wasn't . . . curiosity?" asked Cynthia.

XVII

THE parcel from Laurence Man proved to contain a *Guide to the Employments of Women,* a handbook on nursing, one on the medical profession, the prospectus of a College of Physical Education where 'gym-mistresses' were trained, details of the Cambridge Mathematical Tripos, a *Civil Service Year-book,* the syllabus of the Royal Academy of Music and that of a dramatic school. A letter enclosed stated that the writer thought it safest to send 'through Mr. James' as he did not know Miss Bremner's address, and if she would mention the volumes which interested her he would at once obtain 'inside information as well as full particulars.' *I can give an introduction to a society milliner and to the woman business manager of a large concern, and to a woman secretary,* wrote Laurence, *but I must say that I think only the latter would interest you. Does not your father need a secretary? If you did a little work now and again for him, it would help you to discover where your tastes lay.*

"I see Daddy letting me!" murmured Cynthia. She despatched a brief note of thanks, threw aside the Medical book, skimmed the handbook on Nursing and rejected it, read about the Physical Training College with the deepest interest and packed that prospectus and the *Civil Service Year-book* very carefully for Brittany. She was fully informed in regard to Cambridge and it had been settled once and for all that she was not to go. The Guide she put away. The other two brochures she hovered over with bright eyes and parted lips. Shaun had told her that with a voice like hers she ought to study recitation to music, but had added that it was a false art; and people had

praised her acting in amateur shows, which meant that she had spoken distinctly and worn pretty clothes. One syllabus fell on the discarded pile. As for music! No, she did not feel the impulse. It was a pity, since those two suggested possibilities of romance.

Brittany, with Mummy to take about, was almost dull. Cynthia, being devoted to her mother, blamed Brittany. Peter did not write, ("I wonder why!") and Shaun, whilst praising him 'from a man's point of view,' which was good hearing, for Cynthia was wise enough to value precisely that attitude, depreciated poor Peter's intelligence. Really! She could not pretend that Peter was a genius—there was still no one in the world like Shaun—but he was *much* cleverer than Shaun appeared to think! He was rather silent, and did not do himself justice until you knew him well. She wrote a special letter to explain this in a postscript, and caused Shaun to smile an odd smile. He hoped that she was not going to lose her fine acuteness when she fell in love! There was nothing to complain of in her representation of Peter, which was masterly and fair, altogether worthy of her teacher. It was too fair to be shown to Peter, who might have been discouraged.

From a long grey vista stretching down the years life had suddenly changed for Peter to a broad and winding high-road with something interesting round every corner and beautiful prospects over its gay hedges. He was learning day by day, qualifying himself to be loved by Cynthia. The ingenious tuition of his new friend brought him a rapture such as only the solitary can understand.

"Nothing more about your handwriting?" Shaun asked, on one occasion.

"No, thank goodness," answered Peter. "But a man I rather like has had his rise stopped."

"You never talk of your chums in there. I suppose they live too far out for you to see much of them?"

"Yes, and we're all a bit shy of one another. You never know whom you can trust. That's the feeling even when you think the man is straight enough. And

one wants to forget the Company. Did that mean you were bored, Shaun?''

''No.''

''And such a lot of the chaps want to go 'up west,' unless one plays tennis at their own club, which is generally out in the suburbs, you see.''

'' 'Up west.' I turn to the left to reach 'up west,' I suppose! Does Leicester Square intrigue you, Peter?''

''It's *different!*'' said Peter, thinking. ''Yes, I suppose in a way it's interesting.''

''And in the obvious way?''

''They don't seem human to me. And I'd be too frightfully sorry for them. No, as long as I keep fit, which isn't difficult even in town, I'm not much bothered. I always have managed to keep fit somehow.''

''Writers are worst off that way. They train their imaginations to be vivid. Damned uncomfortable thing to be, an artist! When B. Shaw has his way and socialism makes us all happy and glorious, perhaps the artistic temperament will get its own back. A drunken man stopped me in Wardour Street the other day and said, ''Wha' kindovartisht are you, you shtraw-haired blackguard?' 'Writer,' I answered. 'Shall I stop that taxi for you and start you home?' 'No. And I won't ashk you t' come an' haveadrink! You ruddy shports can alwaysh feel asthoughsh you were tight!' Something in it, too. Chuck over the matches, Peter, there's a dear!''

At this stage in Peter's career a conversation in which he shared did not remain desultory long. ''I say!'' he remarked, after handing what Shaun had asked for, ''did I ever tell you about Eric?''

''The book was not wholly grievous. Who is your Eric?''

Eric was a she, a pretty tea-shop girl whom Peter had admired at a distance for several romantic months, about a year ago. She had apparently departed into pantomime, whither he had not followed her.

These were the moments when Shaun could not help

feeling amused. "You never spoke to her then, except to give an order?"

"No," said Peter. "I say, don't laugh at me, Shaun. It'll dry me up for ever if you do."

"I'm not, old chap. I'm grinning at my own self, who was once equally shy. For goodness' sake, don't tell Cynthia now. Not for years. A girl brought up as she has been would not readily understand, and you are a vile explainer! She's not the type to fall in love with a chauffeur at any stage of her youth. The story you tell me is of truly pathetic loneliness, and you make it a confession. Wait until you are forty."

Shaun was educating Peter, much in the same way that he had educated Cynthia, and the irony of this was his constant reward.

One night while they were drinking beer in a tavern in Holborn after the theatre he observed Peter regarding him with a certain shy wonder. Sensitive to anything approaching criticism from a friend, he promptly inquired: "What is it? You're comparing me with somebody. I know I'm not clever like Shaw."

"You don't talk as splendidly as you write," confessed Peter.

"Splendid is the wrong epithet," said Shaun, appeased. "I can say a few simple things kindly and carve out some beautiful prose by dint of furious and incessant labour. That's Shaun James the novelist. I was a fluent journalist, if you like; but, thank God, those days are over."

Peter developed with such rapidity that, only a short time before Cynthia's return for the winter, when he said reflectively that he wished he could generalise about women Shaun was able to bid him, "Start now. It's your last chance." . . . "You're beginning to understand them," he aded in reply to Peter's look of interrogation. "Understanding is death to generalities. . . . What are you going to do about it, Peter? I've never asked you before; but I must now that she's coming back." They were at Hammersmith, in Peter's sitting-room. Before answering Peter glanced at the photo-

graphs on the mantelpiece. Then: "I'm going straight on," said he, "and I shall do the best I can."

"Very well. Call soon, and make no love. Let her wonder why you do not." Peter shook his head and smiled,—very attractively.

"I'll try," he said. "It's not easy, Shaun!"

"Oh, I know. Keep out of the light when Alan Bremner is around."

Peter frowned. "He was jolly decent to me," he said, slowly.

"Well, if you wish him to go on being it, don't let him think you are in love with his sister. Face facts, Peter. Bremner would think me a blackguard for encouraging you, and would tell you that you were taking a mean advantage of his father's hospitality. Both statements would have truth in them!"

"You haven't been a blackguard!"

"So I think. From my point of view I've been helping to make the best of a job that is bound to turn out badly for the Bremner family, however it results for Cynthia personally. At the best I do not expect to retain their esteem—their liking I haven't already. At the worst, I shall forfeit Cynthia's. Be prepared for trouble, as I am; and for the Lord's sake don't be too proud to step out of the way to avoid it, either at the Office or in Portman Square!"

Peter had to admit the good sense of this, and while he was doing so the postman knocked. He ran downstairs and received two letters, which he read going up. One was from Phyllis and it told how she had smoked an *enormous* cigar in her bedroom, which had not made her feel *in the least* queer, and so she gave herself a new dinner-frock as a reward. "A fine old smell of cigar-smoke there must have been afterwards," thought Peter. "Is she with the Bremners?" No, the address was near Weybridge. The other letter was an invitation from Lady Bremner to dine quietly in a fortnight's time. He showed this one to Shaun.

"Something's up! It's long notice for a family dinner," said the novelist. "I bet sixpence I haven't one of

these at home, Peter. It strikes me that somebody in the house wants to make sure of a talk with you. A friendly talk undoubtedly. No, not Cynthia. . . . Hang Sherlock Holmes! The man was a fraud. There are at least five possibilities here."

". . . What do you think?"

"Oh, were you waiting? It's real life, my son. I think I won't hazard any guesses."

XVIII

SHAUN was right; Cynthia had not suggested an invitation to Peter. She would have liked to do so but hung back for a reason which was obscure to herself; certainly not because she feared she would be misunderstood. And when she heard he had been asked she hastily proposed that Shaun should be invited as well.

"I do not think we want to see Mr. James again so soon," said her mother, with downcast eyes. Cynthia knew better than to persist.

She remained a long time undecided what to wear when Peter came. In the intervals between shopping the problem was constantly in her mind. It was necessary to decide before the day because Marie must not be kept waiting nor must she be allowed to think the decision of any importance. It was not important; only the more you thought about clothes the more puzzling they were, and she liked to look nice when meeting anyone again after a long time. When those two arrived unexpectedly that Sunday she was in rags, which must not occur again.

It was to be a family dinner, so she could not wear either of the lovely evening dresses which Mummy had given her in Paris, where they had spent their last week away. No, it was regrettable! She finally decided upon the green frock which she had worn on her first meeting with Peter.

This time she was the last to descend. "He seems taller than ever, and older," she thought. Alan noticed that she coloured as she entered the room, and that her eyes were very bright. "Sis looks a remarkably pretty girl to-night!" he approved.

"Rose!" he said, aloud.

Cynthia started. She had greeted Peter who was talking to Lady Bremner, and was standing aside, graceful head bent.

"Dad is waiting to take you in."

Sir Everard was eyeing her severely. She hastened to take his arm. "There's nothing new about this room, is there?" asked Alan. "It still looks to me uncommonly like a showroom at Harrod's."

He had succeeded in diverting his father's attention. "Your Mother likes it," Sir Everard said to Cynthia as they entered the dining-room.

"She would have liked it better still if she had only let Shaun do it," retorted Cynthia, as she took her seat and untwisted her napkin. The decoration of the big drawing-room was an old grievance. Lady Bremner had carried it through in great haste in order that Shaun might not be called in for 'endless consultations.'

Sir Everard frowned, and addressed Peter blandly. "James!" thought Alan. "I suppose Mother would not ask him. That accounts for Sis. Poor kid! It's rather rough on her after all." He laid himself out to be nice to her during the remainder of the meal. All her family had somewhat guilty consciences in regard to Rosemary to-night, and they encouraged her to talk to Peter, who appeared doggedly determined to keep the conversation general. Cynthia made shy efforts to approach him, but in vain. "Can those two have quarrelled?" wondered Alan. "Sis seems willing to strike the pathetic note!" He decided they had nothing to quarrel about. The truth was that Peter, racked by scruples, had resolved that in no circumstances whatever could he possibly be more than civil to Cynthia in her father's house. Honour was causing him to behave with the deepest policy, and the consequent circle of misunderstandings round the dining-table would have given Shaun enjoyment for a week.

In the drawing-room Lady Bremner again took possession of Peter, sending Rosemary to the piano—"Mendelssohn, please darling!"—and he soon realised that he

was being consulted, very diplomatically and cautiously, in regard to the influence of Shaun upon the dear child. "She is a little inclined to hero-worship, Peter!" Peter had once thought so himself. He forgot he had gone so far as to tackle Shaun on the subject, and at once became all loyal indignation. He had sense enough, however, to remain silent.

Lady Bremner had not invited him for a specific purpose in order to be baulked of it. She decided on a direct question, pleased by his obvious wrath at Mr. James's misdoings. "We like you and we trust you, Peter. I am sure you will forgive my asking if you think Mr. James has any idea of proposing to Rosemary. Alan thinks he has not; and of course we all hope not."

Peter felt on hot coals. "I agree with Alan," he said. The moment he had spoken he understood that he had chosen his phrase unwisely, for Alan had probably accused Shaun of playing fast and loose.

"Yet we cannot help being afraid that she may never marry while his influence remains," sighed the mother.

Peter was too nearly involved to enjoy the comedy of this, or of his own fervent reply, "I don't think that, Lady Bremner. Honestly!"

Lady Bremner looked at him with a slight smile. She had very pretty white teeth like Cynthia's. Thus thought innocent Peter, unaware that she was engaged in readjusting all her ideas of him. "Do you like Mr. James yourself?" she inquired, knowing now what his answer would be. It was a warm one, and the conversation promptly closed. The evening seemed to close with it, and Peter took an early leave.

Shaun's frank comment was, "You idot! You should have denied me." He wrote a full account to Cynthia, as soon as Peter had started homeward. Next day a district messenger boy brought the following:

Dear Shaun,

I *think Peter behaved very nicely. Why do you run him down if he is your friend? I cannot agree that he ought to have stopped Mother at the beginning.*

I'm afraid you are right and that Mr. Man has been making mischief. I am almost inclined to hate him. Now Peter won't be able to come to see me either, if Mother has made up her mind to eliminate you. I'm not sure that he'll care very much, but I *miss my friends. It is a tiresome world.*

Yours,

Cynthia.

P.S.—Would you approve if I became a physical training teacher?

Shaun wrote back, *A physical training teacher should be one of the noblest creatures on God's earth and is usually a schoolmistress, and sometimes a suffragette. Still you have my blessing, Cynthia. If you think you can escape the dangers, go ahead and prosper.* But before this reached its destination there had been a crisis at Portman Square.

A visit from Lady Bremner at hair-brushing time meant a consultation or a rebuke that must be delivered tactfully. "Come in, Mummy!" Scandals such as Phyllis's bare legs at Tintagel were dealt with later when the culprit was recumbent in bed and at a disadvantage. However, Cynthia stiffened her courage when she heard her mother's knock. She did not intend to be attacked indirectly, and for once—almost the first time in her life—she meant to carry the war into the enemy's country.

Lady Bremner, opening the door, beheld the dainty scene which always softened her maternal heart were she never so determined upon severity. The standard electric lamp which had just been installed was shaded, and the blue and white apartment was full of soft lights, thrown downward about the girlish figure of Cynthia, who was seated in front of the tall cheval glass, brushing away with lithe, quick movements now to one side, now, after a toss of the head, to the other. Gold gleamed in the white of her muslin dressing-jacket. The edging of the loose sleeve which fell from her white, lovely arm was gold. Her hair glinted with sunny lights all down its

length of crinkling, chestnut-brown glory. The glass reflected a flash of grey eyes now and again, veiled immediately by long lashes, but the straight young back remained obstinately turned to the watcher, and Lady Bremner thought she read indignation or defiance in the young shoulders as they squared for an instant during a pause in the brushing. But before this she had exclaimed, "Darling, I have never seen such hair! It seems to grow thicker and longer every month."

"You've been looking at the 'Koko' advertisements, Mother," answered a clear voice with a note of sullenness in it, which vanished as the speaker added, "I think the colour is better than it used to be."

Lady Bremner stood where she was, answering mechanically, "I have always admired it." She wondered whether to withdraw since the child was in one of her queer moods, and reminded herself that the best of daughters has fits of ill humour; but relying on Cynthia's habitual equanimity reasserting itself, as the last speech implied that it was doing, she made up her mind to advance, and perched herself on the edge of the bed.

"Everyone takes it for granted I'm sweet-tempered!" thought the girl. "I'm not! I'll show Mother in a minute. One feels so helpless somehow with one's hair streaming all over the place." She was already making excuses to herself for failure.

Now she divided her mane and began to braid. "I see you've been taking care of your complexion," said the mother, approvingly. "A girl who's lucky enough to have a skin like yours cannot be too careful."

"I haven't, Mother!" declared Cynthia. "I'm ashamed to say it has been taking care of itself the whole summer."

"It's wonderful. Oh, then didn't you use that cream I sent you at Ynys-Gawr?"

"I'm sorry. No, I lost the stuff. And we had scarcely any sun in Brittany." "Why do I hesitate?" Cynthia was asking herself. "Why don't I tackle her?" She stole a glance, but her mother was meditating, a peaceful expression on her face, almost a smile. "Dear old

Mummy!" said Cynthia, aloud. Lady Bremner rocked herself gently, smiling openly. She was glad of this lovely young thing's affection, though it did not count with her compared with her husband's.

"Put back your jacket, Rosemary child," she said. "Push it back. So! Your shoulders are *just* as they should be, dear! You look charmingly pretty so. You know I think we ought to have those wide shoulder-straps on the blue changed to pearls, after all."

"It might make me feel rather undressed," objected Cynthia, doubtfully, "until I got accustomed to the gown." Her face clouded. "Mummy, shoulders can't be pretty. Shaun says they are either beautiful or not beautiful and there's an end of it."

"I trust there is," Lady Bremner could not help remarking, and having begun she decided to go on, in spite of the unpropitiousness of the opening. "Your Father and I and Alan would all like you to see less of Mr. James in the future, Rosemary."

Cynthia readjusted the dressing-jacket, pulled her braids in front of her, and leaned back deliberately in her low chair. "Perhaps Laurence Man has suggested that he is a bad companion for me?"

"The three of us—your family, darling—dislike him. The idea of a middle-aged widower, poor and eccentric, monopolising you to the exclusion of other friends is not nice. Surely you can see this."

"Shaun is forty. He's distinguished, not eccentric. I'm sorry to contradict, but he doesn't monopolise me, Mother. He encouraged me to be friends with Peter Middleton——"

"And I approved of Peter as your friend," interrupted Lady Bremner, "until he also fell under the fascination of Mr. James."

"I don't see what anybody could object to in Peter! And I don't believe Daddy is really against Shaun. I shall . . . I shall tell Alan to mind his own business! What about Miss Taliesin, I should like to know? He has compromised her far more than Shaun ever did me."

"No one has hinted, still less spoken, of compromise.

You forget yourself, Rosemary darling. I should be speaking very differently if there were the smallest question of Mr. James having compromised you."

"I'm sure, Mum, that Laurence Man did!" cried Cynthia, bending forward.

"Hush! You are too loud, much too loud. No, he did not, Rosemary. He told me he thought the exacting friendship of Mr. James was a bar to your marrying, a very different thing!"

"He has done for himself, anyway," said Cynthia, bitterly. "How thoroughly impertinent of him to meddle! It was underhand, mean!"

"It was intended for your good."

"You haven't told Daddy all that!" said Cynthia, leaning back. "He would make short work of Mr. Laurence if he heard of such underhand tricks."

"Rosemary, you must not say things like that to your Mother! Control yourself."

"Mummy, I'm sorry."

Cynthia looked seventeen with her long, beribboned tresses, her wide eyes cloudy with tears, her sad lips trembling, but she felt eleven and in disgrace. The habit of daughterhood is not easy to forget. Lady Bremner did not speak, and presently the girl managed to conquer herself. Bravely, proudly she erected her slender form, raised her drooping, ashamed head for a last effort of rebellion. The brilliance of her beauty astonished her mother.

"I've said I'm sorry, and I am," she slowly pronounced. "Mother, don't let's fight! I can't be such a beast as to give up Shaun, and Daddy will see that, I'm sure." Lady Bremner had an uncomfortable idea that this was true, so she discreetly kept silence, and Cynthia went on, encouraged. "I'm thinking of asking him to let me go to a physical training college, so that I might qualify as a games mistress. That would take me out of Shaun's way. I want to be able to *do* something in the world, to feel I could get my own living if necessary. I want self-reliance. Oh, I want such a heap of things I haven't got!"

But the behaviour of Phyllis had implanted a deep dislike of gymnastics in Lady Bremner; visions came to her of Rosemary with her sweet limbs and body vilely and ignominiously contorted or with her heels flying over her head. "I am sure that Daddy would never consent!" she said, rising. "I wish to hear nothing more of this, Rosemary." Nor did a cool perusal of the documents next morning dispel the horrid pictures thus conjured up. It was clear that if Rosemary were not to be called upon to do such unladylike tricks herself—which was far from certain—she would at least be helping to make it posible for others to perform them. And the subject was closed. Her mother declined flatly to reopen it.

XIX

DADDY was in the library, browsing amongst old sporting books and early volumes of the *Badminton*, on a Sunday afternoon. This betokened a relaxed mind, which his Polly, curled childishly in a big chair with *The Queen* and *The Sphere* on her lap, thought to take advantage of; raising long lashes, she said, "Daddy, do you like Shaun James?" Her voice was innocent but not frank, and to herself it sounded tremulous.

Sir Everard lifted his head, with the action of sniffing. Perhaps he scented the atmosphere of feminine intrigue, for he answered curtly: "I hear his work praised. It leaves me personally indifferent," and stooped to the shelf again.

The women of the household had learnt the seriousness of invoking an autocrat, and seldom appealed to Sir Everard directly. Cynthia knew herself courageous in persisting, "I meant the man, not the books."

Her father turned and directed on her a stern-eyed glance from under shaggy eyebrows. He always ruffled them backwards whilst choosing a book, which added to the terror of his aspect. His Polly, however, was looking so charming that his frown vanished, and "Why haven't I the sense to weep on his waistcoat?" thought she, conscious, "Phyllis would, like a shot!" He began to speak with an air of majesty that was thoroughly masculine. Cynthia giggled internally at the picture of Peter talking like that, "when he's quite old!" She was overstrung, though no signs of it appeared on her face, which was tender and beautiful. He ended a speech of faint praise with the words, "I am inclined to respect him as something more than an amusing companion."

"Then mayn't I ask him here?" said Cynthia, starting up.

Sir Everard looked at her again, and said, suavely, "With your Mother's permission certainly, Rosemary!" He returned to his books, and Cynthia made a stately exit.

This occurred a few days after Lady Bremner had visited the girl's bedroom, and settled the question of Shaun, at least for the time being, without having enabled Cynthia to decide in her own mind whether Daddy was aware of Laurence's treachery. Not that it mattered! She had returned the handbooks with a chill note of thanks and had dismissed their owner from her life. He was gone! He no longer existed. She started Descartes to please Daddy, and studied him seriously to please herself. From the mathematical treatises she turned to the *Discours de la Méthode,* and after being absorbed in it for a week broke off to attend a succession of dances which left her feeling tired and lonely. One thing was certain. She had never since the days at Tintagel contemplated a life without Peter, and it seemed to be singularly empty, so she wrote to Shaun and made a clandestine appointment. Perhaps he would bring Peter, whom it would be pleasant to meet again.

Shaun was too wily, but he talked of Peter and how hardly he was treated by the Great Company and promised to recommend him to read Descartes. They were at 'Alan's' in Oxford Street. The cosy top-room became a radiant place to Cynthia, and the noise of the traffic was the dearest sound in the world. She grew absorbed; chin tilted on slender fingers, elbows on the table, muff dangling. Others came in; her presence lit up the room for them and they envied Shaun, playing the pathetic part of 'old dog' with skill and patience. His sole reward was the humour of the business; and on their next meeting towards the end of November his over-great enjoyment of this caused her to detect him, which she did with a sudden smile. Her face thus sunshine-lit was vivid with a beauty which made the unfortunate Shaun groan. The clatter of teacups drowned

his exclamation—if it were audible and not solely mental. Seriousness had settled on her sweet countenance, and she drew herself up to have it out with him. If she had been cruel she must ask forgiveness; in any case Shaun must not think she cared for Peter; she longed to see him, but that was not love, surely not! It was nice of Peter not to bother her; she did not blame him for leaving her alone. Nor would she lift one finger to draw him back, if he had succeeded in forgetting her.

"You are laughing at me," said she. "Why, please, Shaun?"

"Because you bring me here to talk of Peter. I'm inclined to be jealous." He spoke chaffingly, and added in a different tone, "I've always been your firstest friend hitherto," intending her to think him platonically jealous. Cynthia's intuition told her otherwise, but his gravity almost deceived her. She inquired, "You are not laughing because you think I'm in—stupid about Peter, are you?" with convincing indifference, in spite of the stumble over the Life-word, and accepted his careless denial, each being too much occupied with acting to watch the other. Afterwards came the danger he had foreseen, and she was inclined to regard him as the hero sacrificing his own suit for his friend's. To avert suspicion Shaun had never mentioned his own withdrawal, and this gave colour to the romantic theory. He was desperate now to prevent her examining the relations of all three, and wrote, *Sometimes I'm jealous, sometimes I'm not. Always though, I want you to like Peter.* She reflected, smiling tenderly the while, that here was in any case the truth; and more dances helped her to forget. Shaun, however, dared do no more for Peter than continue his education. So things went on until Christmas in spite of the lover's protestations. Shaun would not let him visit or write, for "If her feeling does not grow with absence it is not what I think it," he declared, and Lady Bremner's attitude when Peter paid his dinner call had been the reverse of encouraging. Cynthia herself had been out.

"Never let the shy bird catch sight of the salt," was

one of Shaun's maxims, and he had violated it. To punish himself he sent Cynthia no Christmas present, and gave Peter a complete edition of Meredith. He prayed that she was not thinking him a hero, forgetting that the writing of scores of letters and the despatch of innumerable parcels, to make no mention of festivities of every description, left the girl no leisure at all for thought at this season. Early on Christmas afternoon Peter arrived, overjoyed, to thank him for the Meredith; he was to dine in Panton Street but had been unable longer to restrain himself from gratitude. Shaun promptly engaged him for tea.

"I've only had a couple of Christmas cards, besides your gift," said Peter, rather wistfully. "Have you much spoil?"

"Anything from Cynthia?"

"No."

"Good sign that. You sent her the Yoshio Markino book, I suppose? No, Peter, I haven't much spoil. Three or four cards; as many letters; a lithograph by that chap we met at the Savage last Saturday—very good of him to think of me, wasn't it? *The Crock of Gold* from Cynthia Rosemary, which I'd got already, as I had to review it,—you take the review copy, will you? —and a very delightful old leather-bound Ovid which I coveted in the Charing Cross Road when I was with a certain Peter Middleton. Thanks and many of them. I should never have afforded it for myself!"

Indeed Shaun was a comparatively poor man, even from Peter's point of view, which caused that library edition of Meredith to weigh for the moment on his conscience.

"Tactless ass that I am," exclaimed Shaun, reading him, "I have the intellect of a deboshed fish. The Meredith was a little contribution to your housekeeping, Peter. It was a sly gift to a lady whom I otherwise disregarded. I hope it will bring you luck, and you've no right to thank me for it yet. Did I tell you that I knew Meredith? Not intimately. He was kind to me when I left journalism."

"I saw him once," said Peter. "I've brought you a sketch I made of him. It's in my overcoat." He departed downstairs to fetch it, while Shaun set his memory to work; he disliked to be forgetful, and was struggling with a dim recollection that some time in the past he had asked Peter whether he could draw and had not received an answer.

Peter was back in a moment. He was surprised at the way Shaun stared at the rough piece of work that he handed over. "Is it like?" he inquired, at last.

"Have you got a portfolio at home?" asked Shaun, still examining the portrait.

"Portfolio?"

"Other sketches, man! Go and get them. I want to see all you've got."

"Do you like it, then?"

"Don't stand there jabbering to me!" cried Shaun, irritably. "I don't think you are a Michelangelo, but I want to see your work. Can't you understand, and clear out? Bring me everything you've done."

Considerably mystified, Peter withdrew, and when he returned nearly a couple of hours later Shaun was beaming. "Here's your tea," he said, rising. "Forgive my ill-temper, won't you? I'll sit by the fire and look through this stuff of yours."

Half an hour later he picked up the sketches from the floor, where he had laid them one by one, tossed the pile on to the desk behind him, and said, "Come over here opposite, and light up. . . . Well, old chap, what do you think of these yourself?"

Peter puffed solemnly before answering. "I don't think about them," he said. "I've never been taught to draw. Sometimes I've reckoned that a pity."

"It may or may not be, considering the kind of art school you'd probably have attended," said Shaun, grimly. "Go on."

"I think I can catch a likeness. Landscape is what I want to do, but I never have the chance. For goodness' sake tell me what you're thinking of, Shaun. You've made me as jumpy as anything."

Shaun leaned forward and put his elbows on his knees, a favourite gesture of his when moved. "My dear Peter, your catching a likeness, as you call it, is a very genuine gift of caricature."

"I wasn't caricaturing Meredith!" objected Peter, flushing.

"But you did it!"

"I say, you are rough on a chap! Why, I wouldn't have minded showing that sketch to Meredith. I had no idea of making fun."

"That's the point. Your caricature has the extraordinary gift of kindness. It isn't brutal, it isn't vulgar, it's quaint and it's illuminating! Hang it all, man, that rotten little sketch of yours *is* Meredith, technically bad though it is! Have you ever tried to sell those cartoons of politicians, the cat ones I mean?"

"I sent one to *Punch* a long time ago," said Peter, over whom a curious prickling excitement was beginning to creep.

"You're no good for *Punch* yet, but I'll sell these four. Damn it, man, you must work like hell! There's an income here in the course of time. You must go to a decent school and learn to draw. Honestly, I know what I'm talking about! I was a successful journalist for years. £800 a year I made and Doris encouraged me to give it up to do good work. There was a girl for you! There was a girl! I pulled in £50 by my first novel, which took fifteen months to write. Why, now, with reviewing, my income is never more than £120! I'm spending my savings. I tell you it's journalism that pays, not literature. You shall add twenty pounds to your income the first year, Peter. This is some use; this may help to Cynthia."

"I've always longed——"

"Don't long to be an artist of any kind. Want to be a journalist," exclaimed Shaun, preaching against his practice. "To be the real article is to be a profound affliction to yourself and to everyone round about you. A genuine creative artist, whether he be poet or musician or painter or novelist, would kill his own baby and eat it

on toast, if that would help his work. And look at the way he's treated by normal people! While he is young it is their job to tell him not to be theatrical, and to warn him of the fate of liars and of boys who decline to enter the Civil Service. When he is adult they despise and distrust him and accuse him of wanting to borrow money. When he's old they emerge and inquire candidly whether he does not think he has wasted his life!"

"You don't mean all that rot," said Peter, reproachfully.

"I mean about your having a gift which may enable you to marry, my boy," said Shaun, sucking furiously at his pipe. "Talk of hiding your light under a bushel!"

That was the happiest Christmas Peter could remember; and when he reached home in a tremendous state of excitement, resolved to do or die in the coming year, he was told a maid had left a note from Lady Bremner. His landlady was deeply impressed. She had "just happened to ask who it was from." He hastened upstairs, and found that it was from Cynthia, who had written to thank him and give her and her Mother's good wishes and ask whether he could take Phyllis (Oh Lord!) and herself (Thank God!) to *Peter Pan* to-morrow evening, and if so would he dine with them first?

Peter thanked God again, from his heart.

XX

THE stalls were filling rapidly. There was a buzz of conversation in the crowded theatre. People were removing wraps, settling in their places, or standing up to greet distant friends. Many of them were habitués of *Peter Pan,* their faces familiar to Cynthia: she bowed, smiling, in return to the salutation of ladies she had met year after year. Shrill childish voices sounded occasionally from the pit above the hum of hushed talk and laughter. The gallery was packed and riotous. Into the upper and dress circles a steady flow of movement was setting; which Cynthia was watching, her arm rested on the back of her seat. Everywhere programme-sellers were busy, followed by the chink of coin. At her side Peter and Phyllis were bending over one of the unfolded sheets. When he straightened himself Cynthia moved also and regarded alternately the programme that she held in her hand and the great curtain which was swaying in a mysterious fashion. Now and then an eye appeared at the peep-hole and was welcomed by three little girls in the front row with shrieks of ecstasy. In the orchestra, violins were beginning to be tuned, a flautist was blowing smooth scales, a double-bass throbbed.

Peter was tall, broad-shouldered, and gentlemanly. She liked him in his evening clothes, was confused to think how much she had enjoyed the meeting after so many months. His dear, plain face was almost beautiful! She dared not ask herself when it had become so. Or how! But she thrilled with the knowledge that she was looking her best. Phyllis, beyond, was pensive in white. The silence amongst them was queer, although it could only have lasted seconds!

Peter was aware of his Beloved in a peacock-blue,

Liberty theatre frock, gold-embroidered, with short sleeves; her hair done high. He blushed hotly as her bare elbow touched his coat. That One laughed at them both, unrebuked; and he turned involuntarily to speak to Cynthia, though he had meant to address Phyllis.

The words were ordinary enough: "One's first night at *Peter Pan* brings the same thrill season after season: doesn't it? I've always been in the pit, and it feels odd to be part of the scene I used to look on at."

"Yes," said Cynthia, taking refuge from her embarrassment in the shortest and plainest speech. She dimpled in uttering it, and he watched her soft cheek and rounded chin for a repetition of the wonder. Phyllis nudged him.

"Don't stare like a cat at a mouse-hole!" she derided, prettily. "Silly old Peter!" Her dark, oval face mocked him at close quarters; bewitching, had he not been in love! He cast about in his memory for something to suppress the tease.

"Where's Joyce?" he asked, instinctively.

"In Devonshire. Where she belongs!" retorted That One. "And I'm off, though not so far. You're the ultimate edge, mooncalf! Lucky for you I'm good-natured. Your behaviour to faithful Phyllis is perfectly abominable. You were better at dinner, but I'll hint to you before I go that Aunt Emmie, who meant you for me, isn't any longer remorseful at having neglected you! S-ss! Bad boy!" She snatched her wraps from the back of the seat and sidled actively along the row, as the orchestra burst into the Pirates' Chorus.

"Avast! Belay! Yo-ho! Heave-to! . . ." hummed Cynthia, under her breath, and heard a tragic whisper, "Phyllis is gone."

"So much the better," she answered serenely and recklessly. "I expect she has found friends. Don't bother about her, Peter!" *"Could I be a poor man's wife?"* she was asking herself, in the breathless hush that preceded the rise of the curtain.

Oh, clear child's voice of Michael! Oh, Nana! Oh, Joy! She settled down to listen, and did so absorbed,

while all the time an undertone of thought was chiming in her like silver bells. Children! . . . She would love to have nice children. . . . "Every girl wishes for nice children," had said Phyllis, who did not. . . . And a memory of Shaun's wisdom was repeated like a melody. "A woman who can see the child in a man is fit to marry, is fit to marry an artist." Peter was very childlike.

Not Peter Pan. Oh, Wendy, you are sweet! Peter Pan was a boy, but the author's genius had not made him a true child. . . . He was a changeling, he never had a mother . . . he was the spirit of boyhood. . . . Peter was very childlike.

Could she be a mother to the child in Peter Middleton? Dared she? He was such a man! Such a big, splendid man; really far cleverer than she; and strange to her. . . . (Oh, the sweetness of them, flying!) Would he ask her? Yes, he was waiting to, she could not be mistaken. . . . They were flying out of the window; the music triumphing, crashing to a climax. She heard the rattle of applause and the curtain was falling, falling. Would it drop for ever? And the voice at her ear said, "I love you, Cynthia!" Earnestly it said, "I love you!" It said, "Darling! Darling Star! Dear Cynthia! You Beautiful! . . ." The curtain was down, and through the wild clamour of the house she listened to her Peter imploring, "Can't you? . . . Can't you?" He asked it the third time, despair in his voice, and she whispered, "Yes!"

The lights shot up. The orchestra began to play the merry *Entr'acte*. Brown eyes were lowered, and long lashes veiled the grey. Brown eyes peeped, and grey were shining with the sudden tenderness of the sky at dawn. The colour was warm on Cynthia's cheeks as she drew back and pulled the wrap upon her bare shoulders. She belonged to Peter and was not afraid. It was a different girl who had arranged this scarf before the looking-glass an hour ago. That girl seemed very young and far-off, and she pitied her because she had not known happiness.

"Peter!" said Cynthia.

He grasped her hand, and let it go as he feared to draw attention to her. His grip hurt, but she did not wince. She loved the pain.

Peter had turned, and now he uttered an exclamation. "Phyllis!" he cried. "There in the stage-box. Do you see, Cynthia?" The runaway was alone with a big, sunburned man of middle age, heavy of countenance, who looked a mighty hunter, not of women. He was admiring her as a wondering Newfoundland might a kitten, and she was flirting desperately. The two in the stalls approached their heads to consult as comrades.

"I say, ought I to go after her?"

"I think he's a friend of the Petos, but Mother would be very angry if she knew!"

"I shall have to, then."

"Be fearfully tactful, Peter!"

He showed no sign of departing. Instead he murmured, "We are engaged, Cynthia!" She dimpled, and he went on, "I can't believe it yet. Are you sure—are you sure you like being engaged to me?"

He was entirely serious, arousing in Cynthia tender amusement. It was incredible she had ever not loved Peter! Besides, women aren't doubtful about things like this. She became conscious of an impulse to tease him in order to know her power, but met his eyes and could not. Her gaze grew wonderful and deep: she answered, "Yes." She had a gift of frank simplicity, rarely bestowed on a girl who inherits loveliness of the refined and delicate type. In a few moments they were talking naturally, with only glances to betray their secret. When they remembered Phyllis the box was empty, and even as they looked the auditorium was darkened, and behind the curtain rang out the Pan-pipes.

Oh, sweet, charmed pipes of Slightly; oh, dancing Ostrich, and Lost Children, and dear House we built for Wendy! Oh, mysterious Lagoon, and fascinating Home under the Ground! Oh, Redskins, and Hook and gentle Smee! They sat apart in a rosy mist, from which they surveyed the traffic of the Never Never Never Land with magic joy, the girl exulting in being owned, Peter en-

raptured and surprised. Cynthia loved her soul and her looks, because they gave him pleasure. She radiated, sparkling, a heavenly young felicity. She asked herself what she had done to be such a happy girl. He was Peter! His nearness filled her with a delicious trepidation. She fluttered at the touch of his hand, which, bold in the darkness, caressed hers lightly; until after a while, greatly daring, she drew off her scarf and contrived a hiding-place where the two lovers might hold each other close.

Once more the clapping subsided in the brightly-lit auditorium amid a general stir of movement and a hum of excited conversation. The girl covered her smooth shoulders, and felt a sensation of stroking fingers as the thin silk settled against her skin. She felt the fabric upon the nape of her neck to be warm from the nest in which their hands had lain interlocked; and turned gracefully away, confused. He saw her inclined forward in an attitude of readiness for flight, a hand on the further curve of the stall; a bare, flexed elbow visible behind her; and her near slender, lovely arm drooping straight, creamy white under the blue of its short, transparent sleeve. On the second finger was a sapphire ring, and Peter could see clasped round the wrist of the other white arm, just beyond the falling wrap, a bracelet of soft gold. The picture impressed itself on his brain and then he, too, turned away.

The stage-box was still vacant, and a wild hope sprang up in his heart that Phyllis might not reappear. He did not know whether or not she were sleeping at the Bremners'. Perhaps her own car was to meet her after the theatre to take her back to Weybridge, in which case the Bremners' new, dark-green Wolseley, which had brought them hither, would be calling for Cynthia. Of course it would! He had not thought of that. Although it made small difference, so long as he was alone with her. . . . But was it—could that be why she was shy, because they would be absolutely alone? A cold fear crept over him, and before he knew, he had whipped round and was calling, "Cynthia! Cynthia!"

Oh, her dear, silky hair, and her neck! She turned. Her cheeks were scarlet, the poise of her chin proud, and her wide grey eyes gazed beyond him! Never had Peter suffered before. All previous agony were happiness to this! His world toppled into hideous ruins. "Are you sorry you said yes?" he breathed, his soul in his tragic face. "You are free, you know." She glanced at him alarmed, and uttered a low singing cry that was half a sob: "Oh, Peter, I've hurt you so! And I was only frightened."

She was swaying to him, like a blue flower, when they noticed watchers and drew back both, and for a long time after the house was dark sat still and upright and self-conscious.

Swiftly, swiftly the scenes passed by. Wendy's Sampler vanished, leaving Outside the House. The short dialogue there sustained the enchantment. Then beauty succeeded quaintness; the music entered on a broad and flowing melody, and the curtain rose for the last time, to reveal the exquisite fairyland of the tree-tops. Moonlight and glamour cast their spell; the little house ascended and Peter Pan and Wendy made their appearance in the doorway. Liza flew off on her broom-stick. The fairy-lights, mauve, white, and blue, flashed in the branches. The music swelled to a noble climax. An ecstasy of youth and joy flew from the beating handkerchiefs. Peter and Wendy were waving from the stage. The whole of the audience were on their feet, shouting and waving, Cynthia and Peter among them. Applause shook the building. The mounting tide of enthusiasm turned all into children. At last the lights shot up; Cynthia slipped into her long, gold cloak, Peter struggled into his overcoat, and they joined the procession moving slowly towards the exit.

"Isn't it glorious?" asked Cynthia. "Isn't it simply beautiful? I'm coming every year if it's revived a hundred times! May I, Peter?"

He was dizzied by the 'May I?' and jogged a neighbour's shoulder, necessitating apologies. Then, "I hope we'll go a thousand times!" he said to her

as they emerged into the open air, which frostily attacked their cheeks. "Bremner," he told the Commissionaire.

"That One is a beast!" murmured Cynthia as they waited on the pavement in the throng of stallites. "I haven't the faintest idea what to do."

Suddenly Phyllis made her appearance, stepping out of the Bremners' landaulet, as cool as possible. "I've left mine up the road," she cried. "Take me up to it, Cynthia Rosemary! Oh, I've had such a topping supper at the Savoy. He had actually come to bother one of the actresses and I couldn't stand that, could I? Don't you think he's rather a dear? Fat and fifty, but a ripping good sort, and, oh Cynthia, what an appetite! You never saw anything like the quantities we ate. I was hungry as a hunter again in spite of your good dinner, darling. Don't you think Pauline Chase is sweetly pretty, Peter? There's mine! There's mine! Tell Rogers to stop, Cynthia! Oh, I didn't see you'd got a bell! Rather decent! We have one of course. Don't you admire our big yellow Lanchester? *Good night,* darling! Thanks terrifically for bringing me! There's no need to say anything to Auntie about my flitting off, but if you think anyone saw me you'd better own up. I don't want to get you into a row, you know. S'long, Peter!"

She was gone. "Did we say anything?" he inquired, as he shut the door.

"There wasn't any need," said Cynthia. The car leapt forward. They turned and looked at each other and suddenly he clasped her to him, unskilfully and almost with roughness. She shook herself free and then meeting his eyes abandoned herself with an inarticulate, sweet cry, yielding her upturned face, her throat, her hair to his kisses. Their lips met. Hers seemed cold and unresponsive. Then they warmed, they returned the pressure of his. Oh, wild rapture! "Darling!" "Peter!" murmured the young voices. Their strong young arms were holding each other tightly embraced, her soft cheek was against his, her hair blinding him,

the warmth of her maddening him, as the car ran smoothly to a standstill in Portman Square.

"My hair!" exclaimed Cynthia, sitting up and touching it with deft fingers. "Rogers will take you home——" as the chauffeur appeared at the door. He opened it and she leaped lightly to the ground. She could have flown. "Good night, Peter! Sweet dreams, Peter!"

"Good night, Cynthia."

The hall door was flung wide. She turned on the threshold in the bright light of the porch, a beautiful, slender person, and waved her hand. The loose sleeve fell from her white arm, which gleamed. It jerked and disappeared, as the car started and passed into darkness, steadily purring, while from behind came to Peter the sound of the closing door.

XXI

Shaun's,
Next evening.

Darling Cynthia,

I could hardly believe it was true when I woke. You are such a darling. I don't know why you care for me.

The package with this was my mother's. I know you like sapphires because you were wearing them. It is sapphires and diamonds. Please like it, dear. *Your hair is lovely and soft against one's cheek; I wish I felt it now.*

Shaun sends his love. Isn't he the kindest chap in the world? There isn't anyone like him. He says he wants back a Jeremy Taylor he lent you. He says I ought not to speak to your father yet, but it seems the straightforward thing to do. I feel as though I couldn't do anything that wasn't straight, until the world ends. If I did I should deserve to lose you. Darling.

What do you think? I can't help knowing, and so I'll call to-morrow after the Office and break it to him. He can't be pleased. I never went to sleep last night till six o'clock, thinking of what I've let you in for. That isn't quite true. I was thinking of you, beautiful, beautiful . . Cynthia, my own darling, most of the time.

You know how I stand. I'm afraid we shall be engaged an awfully long time. I'm sorry, dear.

Shaun says he has written to you about my drawing. I tell you I was glad about that! But even if he's right and I make some money it won't ever be enough to give you all the things I want to, all the things you ought to have.

You won't laugh, because you are so wonderful at

understanding. I feel as though God must have wanted it or He would not have let it happen. I can't tell your Father that. When did you begin to love me? I began when I saw you, I think, but it really came at Tintagel. I knew on the first night.

Darling, if I don't hear from you I'll come to-morrow. If you think it best for us to say nothing for a bit please send a wire saying "Better not." If you are sorry you ever went to 'Peter Pan' send a wire "No," and I shall never bother you.

I love you.

Peter.

Cynthia, may I give you a kiss?

Shaun tells me to say from him, show his letter to your Mother at once before I come. He says you'll understand.

Darling Cynthia.

XXII

Portman Square,
Saturday, 28 : XII : 1912.

~~*Dear Peter,*~~
Peter Dear,

Whatever you decide is right; whatever you wish is to be done. I am the happiest girl in the world. I do not care if millions more are saying the same thing! They are not engaged to my Peter. The ring is lovely, dear. Thank you!! It is as near to my heart as I can coax it to go. Gravity makes it hang too much to the right! I shall have to take it off in the evening or the chain will show. Luckily there is no Marie, and so I can keep it until the last moment!

Daddy will be out this afternoon. You had better write and ask for an appointment; suggest Tuesday at six, when I think *he will be free! It is the last day of his Christmas leave.*

We are all of us hopelessly *tied up with engagements. Mother has gone away until Tuesday; and Cynthia has to look after her Daddy and take him out in the daytime, in return for which he takes her out in the evening. If she can she will prepare her Parent, but you won't be* fearfully *disappointed if he forbids our engagement at first, will you, dear? I love you. I will never give you up. I do not mind waiting years and years and years! I* want *to be a poor man's wife.*

I do not know when it was! I have puzzled myself with thinking it over. Let's say we've always cared from the beginning of the world! I will, if you will. I care now, anyway!

Your

Cynthia.

Yes, please!

Daddy is leading me to St. Margaret's, Westminster, to-morrow morning. I'm afraid I ought not to do more than see *you!*

Shaun is a darling!

XXIII

Portman Square,
December 30th, 1912.

Dear Middleton,

I shall be free to-morrow at the hour you name. Glad to see you then.

Yours very truly,
Everard Bremner.

XXIV

On the morning of the appointment Cynthia entered the library, where Sir Everard was writing, and busied herself with some cataloguing which she had undertaken some time ago in order to find out whether she possessed any aptitude for the work. It still interested her; and she knew that she was doing it well, and that her father liked to see her thus employed. Seizing the psychologic moment when he had finished a letter and was watching her, she asked, "Daddy, Peter Middleton is coming to see you this evening, is he not?"

She went on sorting cards as she spoke.

"Yes," said Sir Everard, precisely. She knew by his tone that his brows were knitted and his gaze piercing. She was glad that he was looking at her; she felt that she made a picture to touch a father's heart. "Isn't that a new dress?" he said, sharply, before she could speak again.

"I'm spending the day with Madge Tressly-Buchan." She was already conscious of being on the defensive.

"What has Middleton to tell me?"

She rose. 'If you are tall and slender, when in doubt rise!' was one of Shaun's maxims. Cynthia, however, acted upon instinct, which led her into the centre of the room where the sunlight was.

"We care for each other, Daddy. Don't be angry with me! I know you'll feel inclined not to agree to our engagement. I simply ask you not to say anything to Peter that will make things unpleasant afterwards. We shall marry in time!" The last words were like the unfurling of a banner.

"There is no need to upset yourself, Polly," said Sir

Everard in a dry tone and with apparent lack of surprise. "I will listen to what Middleton has to say, and consult your Mother." He turned away with an air of finality. She went towards him to kiss him, but he had taken another sheet of paper and lifted his pen. So she ran swiftly upstairs and fell upon her bed and cried. She hoped that she had done good, though not as much as might have been done, but she had spent all her courage in the effort.

After a while she bathed her eyes, and left the house half an hour before her mother was due to return, with a feeling of escape, glad that she was going to be out during the remainder of the day. Her programme included lunch at the Bath Club for certain, and tea there as well probably, as Madge would want to dive, so she need not reach home until after Peter had left. Poor Peter! She was afraid to meet him immediately after his interview with Daddy. Dear Peter! How gentle he was with her always, and he was so big! All day long she was thinking of him. When lunching it was—"Does Peter like salmon?" While swimming—"He loves bathing. Does he ever go to the baths in winter? There is no place to lounge about in, no place where you can get cool after dressing in ordinary baths. If only he doesn't catch cold!" Poised for a dive, she remembered how she had seen him once with his sleeves rolled up—he had splendid, muscular arms, which was nice in a man; she thought he must be tremendously strong. As she was climbing out of the bath she resolved to ask him to bring his drawings to the house next time he came. During tea she said to herself, "Madge is rather off-hand. Would he like her? How nice he is with Mother!" But on the drive home it was again, "Poor Peter!"

Meanwhile Peter had been ushered into the library, now lit by pendant lamps with green shades, and had found Sir Everard in the deep-cushioned revolving armchair in front of the big kneehole table, where he had been seated in the morning when Cynthia spoke. Sir Everard rose in silence to shake hands with him and motioned him to a seat; then he appeared to wait with

expressionless face for Peter to make an ass of himself.

Shaun had said, "If you are boyish, you run the risk of sailing into Portman Square on the point of Papa's toe. Be steady and grim!" Peter had rarely felt less steady, or milder; but he did his best to keep apology from his voice as he began, "Cynthia and I have found out that we love each other, sir. I thought it my duty to tell you." Then he awaited the explosion. It did not come.

"Are you both sure of yourselves?" asked Sir Everard, in a quiet voice.

"Yes."

To his surprise Peter thought he heard the father sigh, and was immediately disturbed by compunction.

"Be frank as to your prospects, Middleton."

He stammered over the recital but it got finished at last.

"My wife tells me Mr. James holds out hope of your succeeding as an artist." The voice was colourless and low.

Peter explained, ending with, "I've made the worst of things intentionally, Sir Everard. I know it will be a very long engagement, and that we shall always be poor, in comparison with what Cynthia was brought up to. That at the very best, I'm afraid! But we're young, and we do—we do care for each other."

"I was expecting to hear that you had brighter prospects than you have disclosed," said Sir Everard, coldly. "I cannot reconcile your making love to my daughter with the conception of your character I had formed previously. Did it not occur to you that there was a point of honour involved? You were a guest in my house, and I trusted you. . . . Answer the question, Middleton!"

"It happened, sir," said Peter, doggedly. "There was nothing deliberate about it. I suppose it was because we're young."

"You certainly are!" exclaimed Sir Everard. He continued in a milder tone, "Do I understand you to ask my consent to an open engagement?"

"We hoped you might, sir. I do not ask quite that now. But I felt all along it was my duty to tell you."

"You were right; only you should have done it sooner. There would be nothing against you, had you the smallest prospect of being ever in a position to marry. I respect your frankness, Middleton, but I cannot allow it to influence me. Whether you are received in this house again will depend upon Lady Bremner. There will be no question of it, however, unless you give me your word that you come on terms of friendship with Rosemary."

"That's impossible," said Peter, turning white.

Sir Everard rose. "I am acting, upon consideration, as I think best for my daughter. I should like to part from you without ill-will."

Peter had risen also. He took Sir Everard's hand. "You won't be angry with Cynthia, will you?" he asked, trying hard not to sob, as he felt childishly impelled to do.

"I shall not reopen the subject with her," promised Sir Everard, who had rung. The next moment a servant appeared at the door. Peter got out of the house, but he never remembered how. Outside he hailed a taxi, and drove to Shaun's, where he was received with open arms.

"You did not *fly* hither, I trust, dear Peter!" exclaimed his friend, rushing for the decanter, with a soda-water syphon under one arm. "You'll get accustomed to these little interviews in time. Drink this, you old ass. When I proposed to Doris she was a ward in chancery, which is a serious matter! You could not expect him to embrace you; and the more violent he was, the sooner will come the collapse, you know."

"He was civil," groaned Peter. "And I don't know why I should be as devilishly disappointed as I am! Listen, Shaun." He gave a verbatim account, during which Shaun's face became gradually more and more serious.

"Yes, it is bad. He said good-bye to you for ever, my poor Peter! He has brains. It is clear that he sees you are both in earnest at present, for he did not believe it advisable to forbid a correspondence or secret meet-

ings. His plan is to daunt you by his iron will and perfect self-control, while doing nothing to arouse defiance and prejudice you against his point of view."

"He has one," remarked Peter. "I couldn't help being sorry for him."

"I should have had one in the sense you mean, if I had not thought the mischief already done at the time you first spoke to me. If Cynthia were seventeen it would be a different matter. But when a girl who is old enough to know her own mind, and has one, loses her heart in the course of nature, that is, without having been attacked by violent love-making or flirtation or emotional appeal, to a man absolutely suited to her in every respect save fortune, well, it behoves a parent to think whether he can afford an allowance. A heart-broken daughter is no satisfaction to a parent, is she? Cynthia is not the kind of girl to give you up, nor are you the sort of man to give her up. Bremner is too sound a judge of character not to know this. He would do better to give in before he ruins the health and spirits of both of you, as happens infernally often in these cases. If he wins, she may seem to forget you, but she won't ever be the same girl again. His honesty is proved by the fact, known to him, that she will never forgive what he has done. Poverty is hard. Poverty is a dreadful thing. No one knows it better than I, for we were frantically poor when we married. But by God! I'd sooner see the girl I loved worn out by struggling with life than hardened in spirit by the prudent avoidance of such a struggle! If he had never introduced you into his house, I mean had he deliberately abstained from introducing you, I should not blame him. That is a different matter. But as I understand it, Lady Bremner encouraged this intimacy in order to oust me. The responsibility is hers; and if those two were capable of thinking each other in error, she would hear of it! Such a bargain as he suggested to have been implied between you and him is ridiculous. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and who can control Love? Has the man never heard of people falling in love unconsciously? I in no way approve his opinions!

But I don't think that he will alter, my dear boy, and you must just make the best of it for the present."

Cynthia did not arrive home until there was barely time to dress for dinner. She crept upstairs, mousy-quiet, and reached the shelter of her bedroom without detection. Tremblingly she rang for Marie, who came and performed her duties. No sooner, however, was the maid gone than Lady Bremner appeared in the doorway, and said: "Daddy has told me something that has distressed me very much, darling, but he says we must all of us forget about it. . . ."

"I don't want to, and I won't!" interrupted Cynthia, suddenly bold. "I couldn't if I wanted to, for I love Peter."

"Hush, darling! You must not ever mention his name to either of us. Daddy will be angry if you do. Remember I forbid you to see Mr. Middleton or to correspond with him."

"But, Mother, can you tell me any single thing against Peter?"

"Daddy says he will never be able to marry a girl in your position, Rosemary dear. That is enough. We are not wealthy like the Petos, you must remember. If he had fallen in love with Phyllis, Aunt Bertha and Uncle Tim could very easily have allowed them a thousand a year, on which they could have managed had Phyllis been economical. But we are in a different position, and you are not an only child, my darling. Mr. Middleton's utmost expectations, even supposing Mr. James's hopes of him are fulfilled, would only amount to some £500 a year or so, and there is nothing certain. Absolutely nothing, except £200 a year, in several years' time. It would not clothe you! What is it that you wish to say?"

"I can learn to be poor, Mummy!"

"You could learn to suffer a moderate poverty, darling. Neither of us doubt that. But this is immoderate, quite impossible. And it is better to make an end once and for all. I shall not receive Mr. Middleton or permit the subject to be reopened; and if you consider *us* in the

least, you will not disobey us. Daddy is much upset already."

"Does he care whether I am?" asked Cynthia, with mutinous lips.

"Rosemary!"

"I'm sorry, Mummy; but really you were taking me a little too much for granted!"

"Would you promise to give the boy up and forget all this?" asked Lady Bremner, ingratiatingly.

"No," said Cynthia. "No, Mother, I can't do that."

"Isn't it partly that you won't, darling?"

"Oh, it's both!" cried Cynthia. "Don't you remember the time when you first knew Daddy? I'm not being a silly kid about Peter, or having a romantic fit as Phyllis does sometimes. Really, Mummy, I love him in a grown-up way."

"I hope not," said Lady Bremner, advancing and kissing her. "Now come downstairs, darling, and we'll be just as usual to Daddy and cheer him up. I have mentioned the subject for the last time."

Cynthia did not think that her father showed signs of distress, and pride forbade her to do so either. After dinner she played to her parents as usual. The evening came to an end. She was kissed and sent to bed at half past ten. Many evenings in the past had resembled this with one difference, of which she became conscious as soon as she was alone in her room. It was to mark many evenings in the future.

"What a dreary feeling!" she said to herself. "You are inexperienced in suffering, Cynthia! I suppose this is what they call 'heartache.'"

XXV

JANUARY and February of the year 1913 fled swiftly away; and as far as the Bremner household was concerned Peter Middleton ceased to exist. He was never mentioned after the day when Alan dropped in and told his sister with marked kindness of manner that he had just cut young Middleton for his own good. It was a pity the parents were not there, for they might have been impressed. Alan was shocked by Rose's upbraidings and tears.

Lady Bremner was watchful, and gave Cynthia small opportunity to reflect upon the future or the past. Her days and evenings were filled with a constant stream of engagements. During a fortnight she ate no meal at home save breakfast, and danced every night. She had always been a popular girl as well as greatly admired, and this season she had an enormous success. There was a brilliance in her loveliness, a charm born of happiness and youth, a tender allurement. She took a man's hand for the dance and swayed into his clasp with so enchanting a readiness and grace that he did not realise he was a proxy for one Peter Middleton, and proposed on the slightest acquaintance. Which surprised and annoyed her. "They don't *know* me!" she said. "They are rash!" Luckily Mummy did not guess the matches she refused. Mummy would have liked to see her a countess or the wife of either of the attachés or of the old Admiral or of the man who talked about Home Rule. The old Admiral was rather sweet, and not quite so impulsive as the others. It would have been quaint if she had loved him instead of Peter, and much more convenient! Such matters must be arranged by Providence; they are so unmistakable and unexpected. She had

never dreamed of loving Peter. Wanting him for a friend had wasted months and months of him, dear Peter! "Bother! Here comes that man I promised to sit out with, and he looks stupid already!"

Peter's letters were brought direct to her bedroom in the morning by Marie. Her mother would never question the maid, she knew, and the correspondence though open remained concealed. Hasty meetings were arranged at Baker Street Station. The dismal strip of green off Paddington Street, beyond the huge block of flats, was their refuge on a Saturday afternoon, secure from any friend of the Bremners; and streets and squares on the way home saw kisses snatched in the darkness. "Peter, we know people here, you mustn't! . . . I must go in, Peter. . . . Yes, I *do*!" Cynthia's honesty was tested when it became a question of arranging these escapades. Rarely could she get away without assigning a reason. Sometimes she boldly declared, "I'm going out, Mummy!" and went; but more often it was necessary to have a pretext ready, the truthfulness of which did not prevent her from feeling mean. Occasionally when she needed Peter to the extent of yearning, ached for his embrace and longed to hear his kind voice consoling a silly girl who cried because everyone was not good to her—occasionally she lied outright. Shaun wrote after one such tragedy, *Yours to hand suggesting you are not afraid of Hell, but deserve that it be created to receive you. My dear child, you* are *there! I would laugh at your remorse, did not the tears come. You shame me, as Peter does now and then. He is another truth-teller, and I confess I regard Truth as a luxury fatal to the intemperate, and only to be entrusted to those capable of using it discreetly. Your people were engaged in pretending you do not love the nonpareil. They stuck their heads in the sand, affected to ignore him. It was a policy, though a foolish one. But now they begin to wag their tails, a fatal proceeding. They advertise their belief in your seriousness when they seek to control your movements, and you should rejoice. Also they break a truce, and I in your place should lie furiously, defying*

them to doubt my word! Like Hilda Wangel I have a robust conscience. Yours, dear, is not sickly but different, and I cannot help you. You must settle it with God yourself.

As Shaun had intended and expected, she asked Peter.

I am awfully worried, wrote Peter. *Darling, you are sweet! I do not know what to advise. I've told enough bangers in this beastly hole in my time! Do you mind my saying 'beastly'? It seems the only word. Darling Cynthia, I feel I have no right to talk to anybody as much above me as you about right and wrong. It would be cheek!* Which was not very helpful, either. Cynthia's decision was feminine. She made up her mind always to have an excuse for being out and to do religiously whatever she had said she was going to do, but not to go out of her way to make the pretext credible. Shaun was highly amused.

In the last days of February, Lady Bremner, who had been ailing for some time, became seriously run down, fell a victim to influenza, and took to her bed with a temperature of 105. She was nursed by Cynthia devotedly, but made a slow recovery and did not leave the sick-room until after Easter. All those weeks the girl was a prisoner in the house. She knew that her mother would hate to see a strange face near her, and resolutely declined outside assistance, both because she was extremely fond of her, and because she welcomed the chance to prove herself a capable woman. If Sir Everard were surprised by his daughter's endurance and capability he did not show it. He thanked and praised her after the corner was at last turned, in a few words that touched her heart. Cynthia could scarcely remember another occasion on which Daddy had praised her except for success with differential equations. It was not his habit, and it meant a great deal coming from him. Not enough, however, she decided after reflection, to justify her in reopening the subject of Peter. After all Mummy had not been dangerously ill, only run down through taking her daughter out so much! She really did not know why Dad had been so worried.

True, the doctor always saw Lady Bremner alone, and was never communicative to Cynthia about the patient's condition, but the word 'influenza' accounts for much to a young and healthy girl, and it was freely used when Mummy was at her worst. At a later date 'nerves' explained the patient's continued depression. Her feverish delusion that the loss of her eyesight was threatened had not persisted after her temperature went down. Cynthia had wanted to bring an oculist, and the offer had magically calmed her mother's fears; at least she had not complained of her eyes again. Daddy had been grave when he heard of this, had listened without comment and did not return to the subject either. It seemed natural to Cynthia afterwards that feverish people should talk nonsense and worry themselves about nothing. She was not experienced in illness, or she would not have been alarmed at the time, she thought. Mummy had been impatient when she suggested an oculist, so clearly there had been nothing to fear. Yes, she was just run down and needed rest, poor Mummy! Cynthia did not blame herself, did not consider her forbidden engagement at all responsible for the depression, because recollection told her that the change in her mother dated from before Tintagel. She had been languid in the hot weather; in Brittany she had not cared to look at beautiful places; in town she had often seemed tired and worried for no reason at all. Yes, she had undoubtedly been run down, and if only she would go to Switzerland she would get well quickly. She would be fit to travel in May.

In May Lady Bremner was in fact much recovered, but she firmly refused to leave London, and Cynthia could not help feeling relief on her own account. Although she loved Switzerland, the prospect of losing her rare meetings with Peter had filled her with selfish terror. Moreover, now that Mummy was stronger the opportunities would increase.

Peter had worked hard during these months of separation; both at the office in the daytime, and in the evening, under the superintendence of Shaun, at drawing. He

went to Heatherley's to sketch from life, and studied the technique of working for reproduction under an old black-and-white artist to whom Shaun had recommended him, saying, "Gin and genius. Once genius and gin. So soon to be gin only that you must learn quickly, Peter." The lessons were not a pleasant experience in themselves, but what he learnt from them was invaluable.

One night Peter had to tell Shaun that another specimen of his handwriting was required on the morrow. He seemed cheerful about it, indeed for once he gave quite an encomium of the Great Company—perhaps because he had received his salary that day and the 'jimmieogoblins' were chinking in his pocket. "Lordly Laurence has his eye on me, but I don't care very much," he declared. "My work is all right. They can't complain of that."

"They can continue to pass you over for promotion," remarked Shaun.

"Not for ever," said Peter, hopefully. "And I 'did down' an old beast called Lemon to-day. He was trying to get me into trouble and failed."

"Nice chiefs you seem to have!"

"Oh, well! Heads of Departments aren't usually chosen for their power of inspiring loyalty."

"Not with you," said Shaun, with dryness.

"Cynthia writes that Laurence Man is making a confounded nuisance of himself in Portman Square," said Peter, suddenly doleful. "Always making up to Lady Bremner now that she's getting better. She simply can't get rid of him when he calls."

"Which she?"

"Cynthia."

"I hope she does not try. I asked her for your sake to put up with Laurence Man, so long as he does not openly make love to her, Peter."

Peter was not pleased, and Shaun, who was out of humour, rebuked him rather sharply. "Haven't you sense enough to know you ought to be grateful to both of us?" he exclaimed, in an irritable way. "You would sacrifice your pride for her—or for me, for the matter of

that! You're a bit of a young ass sometimes." Peter admitted it.

Cynthia had complained of Laurence to relieve her feelings; but she was careful in practice to give him no cause of offence. She was always civil, which she considered more than he deserved after his treachery to Shaun, and if she did her best to avoid being alone with him she flattered herself that he was not aware of it. Wherein she underestimated him. Laurence knew perfectly well that he had lost whatever power he possessed over her. He was not Lady Bremner's confidence in regard to Peter, and he was still inclined to believe in the supremacy of Shaun. Peter was altogether too insignificant in Laurence's eyes. He kept a watch upon his handwriting partly because he had once threatened Cynthia that Peter should suffer for the privilege of using her Christian name, partly because he recognised the absurdity of the presence of men of his type and class in the offices of the Great Company. Laurence never forgot an enmity, but he was not dishonest in the business sense of the term. If Middleton made a slip and played into his hands, he would discharge him without mercy. He did not intend, however, to manufacture an excuse to get rid of him, unless the Directors agreed to his scheme of the gradual elimination of all public-school men from the staff; 'all,' of course, except himself and other persons who had entered the service with a promise of rapid promotion. Laurence was a firm believer in the divine right of wealthy gentlemen, or of gentlemen with connections to push them on, to be rulers of the world. Pride made him dislike seeing any of his class in a subordinate and hopeless position; and as an official he despised what he called 'the incompetence of discontented, muddle-headed employés,' that is to say, of men educated so well as to be above their work and with no incentive such as the prospect of early promotion to cause them to bow their necks to the yoke willingly. If the Directors fell in with his scheme he promised himself to dispose of the lot, one after the other, by whatever means came to hand, and to reorganise the offices on a sounder basis.

Board-school boys would actually be grateful for a smaller salary than these fellows grumbled at now, and they would leap at the social position conferred by a clerkship in the Great Company, which was a tradition handed down from the 'good old times.' He would have an efficient staff, and show the Directors what could be done with it. And then he would become Managing Director at a largely increased salary for that post, and marry Rosemary Bremner. Peter Middleton was only a pawn in the game of Laurence's ambition. If he could be sacrificed to advantage he should go, but the wise player does not force exchanges unless he is certain to improve his position. Middleton, however, should be the first; Laurence mentally promised him that.

The early months of 1913 saw also the final break between Alan Bremner and Helen Taliesin, who disappeared from the family life of the Bremners suddenly and without overt cause. She came to the house for the last time in March, to inquire for Lady Bremner, and would not enter. After that she merely was not. Cynthia had not forgiven her brother for cutting Peter and displayed no curiosity about his affairs. It struck her, however, as intensely odd that in a family of only four people, all fond of each other and on terms of affection whenever they met, there should be a mystery, a grudge, and a clandestine love-affair! *The more polite is parental tyranny,* Shaun wrote in May, *the more subtly is double-dealing encouraged. And I welcome your continued animus against your brother, since it proves you can be obstinate too* (*not that I had doubted!*). *Peter does not report that you are becoming callous, selfish, or 'a horrid girl,' so I cannot but believe your fears unfounded. I had not noticed a change myself. If your people complain—as I do not gather they have done up to the present—make them admit that they have hardly encouraged you to display your true self or your better feelings. I am sorry they do not treat you brutally, for then you would wear your engagement ring upon your finger instead of round your particularly adorable neck!* (*Old habit, and a love of sincerity!*) *The thought of it*

over your heart must encourage Peter to impatience, serving no useful purpose thereby; the picture of it adorned by your hand would warm him to emulate the open courage of the wearer. Alas, Cynthia, you are a living girl, and therefore imperfect! Not as I should have written you. The silken chains hold you fast, and your mother's illness came at a right moment for her plans. The steadfast wearing of that ring from the first would have saved much trouble in the future, I fear, and write myself down an ass by recording the bray. It resembles a bray in being a useless noise unpleasing to the hearer. So does my counsel to demand a latchkey and an allowance at once, with in the future a wedding at St. George's and a much larger allowance. The latchkey of the daughter is the symbol of the trust of the parent. Every girl should possess one and rarely use it. Weep daily on your father's waistcoat until you obtain one, is my advice. Forgive me, dear, if I make things harder.

Cynthia burnt the letter, and cried. She knew she had not the courage to break through all the traditions in which she had been brought up. For the rupture with Helen Taliesin she decided that she blamed Alan, and wondered what she would do if she met the girl, an event which never happened. She understood now why she had not appealed to her for assistance in the abortive struggle for freedom by way of employment. She had always had a premonition that Alan would make a beast of himself!

XXVI

THE second period of Cynthia's engagement justified to a considerable extent Shaun's gloomy forebodings. Lady Bremner, now in her usual health, retained the habit of nervous dependence upon her daughter, and was unwilling to let her go out of her sight. Inwardly exasperated, the girl was still not able to be openly unkind, and Lady Bremner was so wrapt up in herself that she never guessed how near her slave came several times to revolt. She had in truth almost forgotten the existence of Peter, and her plaintive demand, repeated evening after evening, "Darling, would you mind talking or reading to me until it's time to dress? I think I ought to rest my eyes, which feel tired," had actually no subtlety in it, which Cynthia found incredible. She did not know anything that could have driven Peter from her own thoughts. Besides, her mother did not need her; as was proved by the frequency with which she cheered up again, and at the first lapse in the conversation picked up a review and began to read.

Very bitterly Cynthia said to herself sometimes that she was in the position of a paid companion without receiving any pay. Other people suffered for her weakness, her soft-hearted compliance with her mother's whims. Peter only admired her for a virtue of self-sacrifice she did not possess, but Madge Tressly-Buchan, who was inconveniently dependent on Cynthia's influence, had drifted into a love-affair with a chauffeur who was a gentleman and a bad lot. This was partly spite on Madge's part, because Lady Bremner had declined to let her train Cynthia for the ladies' diving championship of the Bath Club. She had threatened, "All right, Lady Bremner. I shall probably make a fool of myself thi?

summer, but that doesn't matter to you." She had to be packed off at the beginning of June to shoot elephants, after the letters had been ransomed. Cynthia lost a lot of healthy pleasure, as well as her companionship, through missing the mornings at the swimming-bath, and she was extremely distressed by her friend's folly, although she did not attach as much importance to it as did Lady Bremner, who would probably in the future make it an excuse for severing the friendship.

The firmest stand she made was on the old, vexed question of Shaun James, whom she insisted on meeting occasionally. He was free in the mornings, or said he was free, and gave up more than a few to initiating Cynthia into the knowledge of Man. By him she was enlightened, very pink and bright-eyed on a windy day at the Round Pond, as to the physiology of marriage ("You'd better tell me, Shaun dear; Mummy never will!"). And in the galleries of the Victoria and Albert Museum she learnt wisdom concerning the married state for which she blessed him in after-years, incidentally gathering what she had been saved from by refusing Laurence Man. Greatly to Shaun's amusement he was called upon to perform the same office of priest of the mysteries to Peter; and to neither did he spare his own reputation. Indeed he pictured Doris James to Cynthia as a most unfortunate woman with a husband only faithful because he could not bear to cause her pain, so alarmingly did he represent the imagination of an artist. Cynthia smiled and only half believed, but the half was sufficient for Shaun's purpose. When the subject was finally done with, "I'd like to say how much I admire your frankness and good sense," he said. The compliment pleased Lady Bremner's daughter more than any other he had paid her. She wanted to be wise, and was proud that she had forced herself to be brave.

To Peter the City was becoming a nightmare place where he worked as on a treadmill, harder and harder, without ever making any progress. Indeed the more he strove for promotion the more swiftly did his position glide away from under his feet, the more unpopular did

he seem to become with the High Officials. Only Mr. Brown remained a steady friend. He could always be relied upon for justice. Peter saw others as well as Blotter pass over his head, and began to make strenuous attempts to get a secretaryship to a public company, or any kind of post that promised a better salary or offered prospects of any kind. He answered advertisements and made the acquaintance of adventurers and rogues. Cynthia when staying with the Petos—Sir Everard and Lady Bremner had gone away together alone—confided in her aunt and uncle, and tried to persuade the latter to use his influence to help Peter. She wrote, and Peter read aloud to Shaun, "*Aunt Bertha lives for her gardens. She has fifteen acres, and they keep her busy! Even if they did not exist I fear she would not go against Mother. Uncle Tim simply won't be bothered, Peter. It is mean of him, because he must have any amount of power. I do not want to confide in Phyllis, who would certainly cry out, 'Let him dare not to!' and make his life a burden—but I think without success. He would know she would get tired of bothering, and after all it isn't for her.*" Shaun said, "That little Phyllis as the punishment of a fat old Banker! Ha! There is an object for her existence, after all."

Peter went on reading, with omissions: "*Joyce's father and mother would like to help if they could. I believe Auntie Marjorie has written to Daddy, but I'm* afraid *it won't move him. She is much younger than he. They will not be home from India until the end of next year! Uncle Rupert expects to get the regiment then. Dear little Joyce wrote me the kindest letter and sent her love to you. You did not mind my telling her, Peter?*"

"The more the better," said Shaun.

"*I'm afraid the Petos are no good. Cheer up, Peter. I'll wait for ever, and call myself a lucky girl. . . .*"

"Groans!"

"*You know what I mean . . .* she says. I say, I can't read any more!"

But while the City grew abhorrent and threatening to

Peter the rest of London was frequently illumined with flashes of sunshine which were meetings with Cynthia. She was away for a fortnight in June paying the above-mentioned visit and for three weeks in August. That was all, and as the year went on Peter became a master of the topography of the Metropolis, regarded as a place where one wants to kiss, and while lamenting the bareness of the result topolatrised certain hallowed spots!

London had become the background in his thoughts for moving pictures of sweet Cynthia, clad in grey, cream or pale blue, brown, white or navy blue, with all sizes and shapes of hats. . . . Cynthia in Kensington Gardens on a fresh, spring day; Cynthia at Hertford House, waiting for him in front of a group of Watteau's ladies, herself as elegant in the modern fashion; Cynthia on her way to tea in Downing Street; Cynthia before shop windows; Cynthia reverent in the gloom of churches. With the smallest effort of his imagination he could see tall Cynthia standing by a Sphinx on the Embankment, watching the shifting crisscross of lights on Waterloo Bridge and the shiver and gleam of them thrown on the shadowy water, her graceful neck bent as she listened to the throbbing hum of distant thoroughfares, the whirr and clank of trams, and the delicate wash and lap of the Thames against the steps. He could feel the sway and barely perceptible droop of her shoulder against him, as her gloved hand was met by his in the darkness. He could see the straightening of her slender form as she leant away. And then there was a picture, with too many variants, of her disappearing into a taxi, with wistful grey eyes and a smile on her lips; and a glimpse of her suddenly tragic, seen through the open window and snatched from view, leaving a horrid, petrol-smelling vacancy in which there was no Cynthia!

Peter removed to lodgings in Church Street in order to be nearer to her. He started a pipe and strove to become a philosopher. Then occurred that meeting at the Natural History Museum when they almost quarrelled over her answer to the great question which had been

worrying him for weeks, "Could a girl of her beauty have avoided being kissed?" He put it, before a ridiculous striped monkey, feeling himself of the same tribe.

"When I was eighteen and just out, I was curious, and silly sometimes like other girls. Not more than three times then."

"What about afterwards, I should like to know?" asked Peter, indignantly.

"You aren't jealous, are you, Peter?" said Cynthia, knowing well that he was, and not displeased. "I never kissed anyone back!"

"Certainly not," he asserted, turning red.

"I let Laurence Man once. I know I was a perfect idiot. Forgive me, please!"

"Did Shaun ever . . . ?"

"You've no right to ask about particular people!" exclaimed Cynthia, spiritedly. "No, he didn't, if you want to know. I should never dream of questioning you, Peter!"

"Who else besides Man?"

Silence.

"Who else?"

Silence.

"Who else, Cynthia?"

"No one."

"You were the first girl I'd ever kissed," said Peter, thoughtfully. "Let's leave my brother and go to look at the whales. That's the quietest room, and I've got to go on my knees and beg your pardon for ordering you about."

"You needn't," said Cynthia, softly. He looked at her. Love and mischief were dancing together in her eyes, and she smiled. He did not wait for the shelter of a whale, but then neither did he go upon his knees! Whilst they studied the Cetacea (and the movements of the attendant), she told him that he must never, *never* give way to her, even when she was right. The attendant almost caught them that time; so nearly that they fled in confusion before his suspicious glare and did not venture to return to the Museum for many a

long month. After all, it contained little of interest except the Cetacea.

Cynthia rarely had much money in her pocket during these expeditions, and Peter had to supply her. He found a ridiculous pleasure in so doing. They lunched sometimes at Roche's, on a Saturday, when Peter could get away in time and Cynthia stifle her conscience. Shaun's favourite waiter did his best to spoil them by little attentions and swiftness of service and an obvious pleasure in their romance, all of which Cynthia took for granted in the most natural way. Many of their meetings were at tea time at 'Alan's,' in the little top room to which Shaun had introduced her. The exit at the foot of the staircase past the boy in buttons was dangerous, as Lady Bremner often had tea at Fuller's in Regent Street and might easily be passing on her way home. She sometimes made an appointment with Cynthia at Liberty's, and was given the slip. On those days an encounter outside 'Alan's' would have been fatal! Later, as Cynthia grew more bold, she arranged her rendezvous nearer at hand and with greater frequency. Debenham and Freebody's, Selfridge's, outside Mansell's, a fascinating shop-window to gaze into whilst waiting and a favourite haunt of Cynthia and Shaun, and Bumpus's, of which the same might be said, were favourite spots for an apparently accidental meeting. When there was necessity for extreme caution, in other words when Cynthia had stretched the truth in order to escape, she usually appointed the entrance to Tottenham Court Road Tube Station, opposite the Oxford. It was quick of access and out of the range of her mother, but she was so conspicuous there that she had to come late, in order not to find herself alone. As a rule she was a punctual girl.

Once they ran into Shaun, in Greek Street, Soho. Once, having unwisely ventured to the Royal Academy, Cynthia was recognised in Old Bond Street afterwards by an acquaintance. Fleeing to the left into Grafton Street they fell into the hands of Mrs. Gwiney, who remembered Peter, she being the 'sheathed lily' of his

first dinner-party at the Bremners', and insisted on talking and reminding him that she had played Liszt. She looked arch enough to have added, "while you were gazing at this dear girl." Evidently she had sharp eyes. When they escaped from her it did not seem prudent to turn back into Bond Street, which they should never have left; and Cynthia, now reckless, would not leave Peter, so they plunged down Hay Hill, where the Prince Regent and his brother were held up by highwaymen and could only raise half-a-crown between them. It was at least as perilous to the lovers, because they had to pass the side wall of the Bath Club. No one was coming out of the ladies' entrance in Berkeley Street, and Cynthia breathed again, but in Berkeley Square they overtook the Countess of Kempston walking and had to double back and take a taxi. Peter was dropped in Oxford Street. He had only threepence in his pocket, and that was no good to Cynthia, who was penniless. She was reduced to bidding the maid pay the man, and hurrying upstairs. Lady Bremner was out as it happened, but had she been at home Cynthia would never have dared to approach her, for fear of questions. It was two days before she could settle with the maid, so short of money did her parents keep her.

The Whitehall and Pall Mall districts were barred because of Sir Everard and Alan, and the Zoo was dangerous because of the former. At the Tate, which had been the topic of their first conversation, Peter learnt that Cynthia could be petulant and saucy, but she assured him that the mood only happened about twice a year! In the upstairs room, before *The Seeds of Love*, she announced her resolution to give up taxis in order to practice herself and to save the fares. The presence of the attendant could not prevent Peter kissing her fingers, which he did with fervour, just unperceived! After this it was he who waved to taxis, 'for solitude,' usually in celebration of the sale of a drawing, which Shaun permitted now and again, although he declared that the doors of journalism should be burst open, not pushed, and that Peter must not be in a hurry.

Nothing further was heard of the unlucky encounters in Mayfair, and soon Cynthia beamed on the City, shining starlike against a background of black coats and gloomy faces. She inspected St. Bartholomew's, Smithfield, drank from the fountain outside the Royal Exchange because she liked the figure above it, and wandered round the interior of the Exchange, exclaiming at the badness of some of the mural paintings contrasted with the Brangwyn, the Leighton, and the Abbey. This visit was cut untimely short by the appearance of Semple, who luckily did not perceive them where they stood back in the shadow beside the Admiralty notices. The prospect of lewd jests daunted Peter, for if he were provoked to knock the jester down that would be the end of all things so far as the Great Company was concerned. He rather chose retreat, and at ease on a 'bus, they read together the Certificate of Character she had brought him in a letter from the household of Welsh girls. *We cannot say that C. R. B. is never a cat. She is* distinctly *human. But we will say that she is always a nice cat, and thoroughly repentant afterwards.* They got off, and walked round Lincoln's Inn Fields to discuss it.

Peter heard little of the full, active life of dances, theatres, and dinners which she led apart from him. He did not even know that during the autumn she was swimming and diving every day at the Bath Club. Nothing could indicate more clearly the separateness of their existences than the fact that she never once thought of telling him of her great disappointment when Madge Tressly-Buchan was prevented from training her through Lady Bremner's interference. Besides, Cynthia would not criticise her mother to Peter, although she felt very much inclined to after Madge had departed disconsolately abroad. It was all too foolish. She could see no harm whatever in diving at a private competition from which the Press was rigorously excluded, and Madge would never have been so foolish had Cynthia been meeting her daily at the Club. Lady Bremner was wrong in supposing she had the smallest influence over Cyn-

thia. On the contrary the big, sullen, impulsive creature was a baby in the hands of her self-possessed friend. Cynthia was one of the few people who could do anything with her when she got into one of her passions or fits of obstinacy. She felt herself responsible for Madge, and was mortified as well as distressed by the unfortunate affair with the chauffeur. Then the moment Madge was gone Mummy had said, "Why don't you go to the Bath, darling, and have a swim? You are looking quite pale."

It is the drawback of a forbidden engagement, as of a secret one, that intimacy is slow of growth when the girl has pride which the man respects and does not try to conquer. Peter liked her sweet letters, gossip-less and to the point—she was too busy to be a voluminous writer—but he would have enjoyed them more had they told something about her daily life. He did not admit this to himself. His idol could do no wrong. Still, he wrote very different epistles in return. Shaun, who was in a position to judge, complained that he had taught Cynthia to describe and now she would not do it. Peter, on the other hand, whose descriptive powers were of the smallest, laboured long and manfully to give pictures of the Company. The resulting confusion Cynthia laughed and cried over. It was impossible to praise his literary efforts. But when he was not trying to describe he wrote charmingly.

On one occasion only did they get a whole day together—in the late autumn; and they spent it at Hampton Court. Cynthia walked boldly out of the house without saying whither she was going, and telephoned that she would not be in to lunch. This was Shaun's advice, acted upon desperately in order not to lose the opportunity of Peter's leave. All day her cheeks were pink, all day Peter's eyes followed her every movement, worshipping. He lost their tram tickets and had to buy others, the waiter gave him wrong change unrebuked; it was an expensive outing. But what a background the grey walls of the palace and the old gardens and the tapestries and weaponed halls made for his dar-

ling! Those were happy hours of youth, and a happy rush back on the outside of the tram in the chill breeze of the evening, their hands clasping each other under her great white muff. Cynthia had not really meant to tell the truth if questioned, but she came in bold; Lady Bremner, however, took it for granted she had been at the Kempstons' and failed to comment, so the opportunity for martyrdom was lost. Peter had gathered something of the truth that day, and was puzzled how Cynthia managed to keep on good terms with her mother seeing the constant state of supervision in which her life was passed. Shaun told him, "It is because all is above board. Lady Bremner does not spy. She doesn't make a confidante of her maid. She is not mean. She annoys Cynthia in trifles without alienating her affection."

Peter was inclined to want more, so Shaun who was in a jealous mood barked at him, "Girls are different from men, Peter!" and shut him up. The truth was that silence and reserve had become so habitual with both mother and daughter that it seemed well-nigh impossible to break either into open mutiny or open censure. Lady Bremner discovered that Rosemary had not been at the Kempstons', but she never said a word.

XXVII

CYNTHIA saw the Old Year out in Edinburgh and made brisk resolutions. Her engagement had lasted twelve months and was no nearer to recognition. Yet she felt cheerful. "Hope is the daughter of discontent and good health," said Shaun, when she told him. Cynthia pointed out that he was responsible to a large extent for her confidence, and this was true. When Peter was most despondent, Shaun remained optimistic concerning the selling qualities of his work, exhorting him not to be in a hurry. He replied now, "Keep your resolve and wear your ring, Cynthia. That is the way to help things on." In private, Shaun was disquieted by the steadiness of the parents' opposition and the excellent terms on which they lived with Cynthia. He would have liked them made uncomfortable every hour of the day by the sight of a declining, fading, pathetic child. Cynthia had never looked better in her life. Or they should have been attacked by means of constant disobedience, quiet but open, in the form of refusal to ignore the engagement and the claims of Peter upon the girl's time. Not that he wished Cynthia to imitate the insolence of so many modern daughters. He neither desired this nor thought it possible. He had, though, apparently overrated her fighting courage, or else underestimated the strength of her affection for her parents, and he frankly admitted that Sir Everard was victor of the first year's struggle. There was no earthly reason why the latter should consent to an engagement of whose existence he was never reminded, or make the sacrifices necessary to provide Cynthia with an adequate allowance while there remained any hope at all that she would forget Peter. The father misjudged the girl's

seriousness, just as he, Shaun, had failed to allow for the lack of combativeness in her nature.

When Cynthia announced her intention of learning to cook, "Any caprice but the fatal one!" spoke her mother's eyes as she gave permission, which she did in hasty retreat from the room. Her voice had said, "Many young girls are beginning to learn, they tell me." Cynthia could not help being amused when she found that the pose of the moment had deprived her of all appearance of rebellion! She was in the fashion without intending it—the consequence of four weeks in Edinburgh among sensible people, who did not take up new fads with sudden enthusiasm only to abandon them with equal celerity. Smiling, she confessed defeat, and learnt to cook Peter a seven-course dinner. Her family made no remarks on her perseverance.

One evening Cynthia appeared at dinner with a slender gold chain round her bare neck and disappearing into the bosom of her dress. No notice was taken at the time; but that night Lady Bremner came to her room after she was in bed. The girl was wearing a nightdress which was cut somewhat low, and again the chain was visible. Acting on impulse she drew her ring from its hiding-place and held it up.

"What would you and Daddy do if I wore that always on my finger?" she asked, too nervously.

Lady Bremner had not really the faintest idea what they would do, but she was quite certain that Daddy, having once declared against the engagement, would be immovable as a rock—that was the conception she had of her husband; she was horrified at its being suggested that he could change. She said firmly, "I am sure Daddy would send you away, darling! He would send you to Aunt Marjorie in India." The readiness of the answer deceived Cynthia completely. Her eyes filled with tears and the corners of her pretty mouth began to droop. Lady Bremner kissed her hastily and fled, conscious of a victory, possibly decisive. She had indeed done much harm, as well as conquered any desire on her daughter's part to rebel openly. Cynthia would

have loved to see India, she was extremely fond of her aunt and uncle; but then she was much more fond of Peter and Shaun and her parents, and to leave them all for an indefinite period seemed to her an unbearable prospect. She judged her father quite capable of executing the threat, and Alan would back him. She was still on cool terms with Alan, who, since Miss Taliesin's disappearance, had become more and more his father's confidant.

Peter heard and groaned. Shaun heard and whistled. Twenty years ago he would have interfered, for he was not at all lacking in self-confidence; he could certainly have made the situation clearer to Sir Everard than it appeared to be at present. However he was over forty, and reserved himself for a greater crisis. Peter's groans were stifled by being asked, unexpectedly, to the Countess of Kempston's small dance, at which Cynthia and Phyllis were to be present, and not Lady Bremner; Phyllis having good-naturedly procured him an invitation by saying he could tango. Peter had three weeks in which to acquire the art. After the first lesson he would have called three months insufficient!

A dance in Carlton House Terrace was a new experience for Peter. He realised from the moment of entering the ballroom that Cynthia was popular in society; he found her surrounded by men, whom she dispersed cleverly in order to greet him. The sight, which might have stirred his blood, was humbling. Any one of these men could have given her so much! He murmured it, prefaced by an, "I say," boyishly eager. She answered, "So much that I do not want!" Then the daughter of the house, a pale blonde who had a 'devotion' for Phyllis, descended upon him and carried him off.

A hidden string band struck up magical 'Sourire d'avril,' the only tune to which Lord Kempston could dance, which therefore always opened the programme at his house. A partner had not been found for Peter. Phyllis flitting by, vivid in yellow and scarlet, nodded and smiled. But Peter was looking for Cynthia. Here she came, valsing in the old style most beautifully. He

noticed now how she was dressed, admired her frock of black and silver with a kind of gauzy jacket that floated from her white arms as she circled. Her pretty slippers were black and silver. They twinkled on the shining floor. She vanished into the throng, her starry eyes alight with youth and swift movement, a straight-backed, willowy girl, with the loveliest arms and the slenderest ankles in the world of girls.

The next was the dreaded tango, out of fashion, but still the rage at Kempston House. Peter's partner was more incompetent than himself and soon elected to watch. Little Phyllis and a slender horse-faced man—like a knight at chess—were the most conspicuous couple. The girl at Peter's side remarked rather cattishly, "Miss Peto told me tango was becoming to a flexible figure. She said: 'So I tang!' She does, doesn't she?" It was almost an epigram. To his surprise—though why?—Peter perceived Cynthia skilfully and gracefully performing the difficult dance. "How little I know about her everyday life!" he thought. "Now there's a girl I really do admire!" said his partner, who prided herself on her quick observation. Peter withdrew into a shell of small talk.

His dances with Cynthia were heaven; his struggles with Phyllis, the reverse. She called it teaching him. Phyllis was now a cynic, and informed him, "I shall probably go to the bow-wows." She was huffed because his denial lacked proper fervour, but suddenly changed to sweetness and coaxing, "You don't really think I shall, Peter?" He was honest in his reply, "Of course not!" Phyllis had kept up a kind of correspondence with Peter, mostly on her side, seldom evincing a genuine interest in him or his affairs; and he could have named her phases of a year. First, Roman Catholicism, with the religion omitted; then yearnings, with bad poetry; then a literary mania, during which she asked a thousand questions about Shaun ("Cheek!" thought Peter), always referring to him exasperatingly as "Ye pathetic Shaun!" Now it was cynicism.

This chance meeting with his darling suggested the

possibility of others, and accordingly Shaun procured tickets for a Fancy Dress Revel which he thought Cynthia might like to attend. The result was tragic. Lady Bremner discovered that Peter was to be present and imposed her veto on the entertainment at the last moment because of the "queer people who might be there." She promised that Cynthia's dress, 'Burne-Jones,' should not be wasted, which did not console the victim in the least. Cynthia dissolved into tears outright, like a child of ten. She was tired and overwrought from a succession of entertainments; perception of which assisted her mother to be firm. It was a fact that the girl needed rest, and Lady Bremner was genuinely unconscious of not giving her the sympathy that she needed more.

"I thought my choice of costume would have disarmed the woman," said Shaun. "Could anything be more conventional than Mephistopheles? He must be a simple-hearted ass who would wear that."

Peter grinned in spite of himself. "Nothing could make you look a simple-hearted ass, Shaun."

"So it appears. I am suspected of vulgar appropriateness and a Faust is deduced. Through the indiscretion of Phyllis Peto, no doubt! It will be a shame if that girl does not engage herself to a midshipman, because the Banker will miss a priceless opportunity of quoting from 'Peter Pan,' 'Me poor lad! Me innocent little tarpaulin!' "

On the night Phyllis denied the accusation warmly. If she had given away the secret she had already forgotten the fact. She was attired as a snake in scaly tights, becoming to her lean grace of outline,—Peter heard her described as "a black-haired, slender, fine-limbed young devil, pretty as they make 'em." *He* was wearing a modest domino. Phyllis, surrounded by a group of men, danced a solo dance and afterwards tied herself into snaky knots on the floor. Two or three of the spectators were the worse for drink and their comments, free and easy and familiar, did not please her in the least. However, it is impossible to look scornful or

dignified on the floor with your ankles crossed behind your neck and your hair coming down, which was Phyllis's condition when Shaun and Peter shoved their way into the circle. She was beginning to be a little frightened, for Phyllis was not really what an admirer had just in a loud voice declared her to be, namely 'hot stuff'; her extremely reckless looks and behaviour belying an essential innocence. She was naughty, but not bad.

The scene, which was becoming unpleasant, was ended by a large man in huntsman's pink bursting through the ring of spectators and picking her up in his arms as she was, without waiting for her to undo herself, and bearing his capture triumphantly away. Peter recognised him as the occupant of the box on the night of his engagement, and deduced from his present expression that the actress he was then pursuing had ceased to interest him.

"That's the type of chap," said Shaun in his ear, "who when he's ancient becomes an 'old buffer.' I like him. I hope he will spank her, and that she will continue to refuse him for the reason that he is twice her age. He will take the greatest care of her, because she's a lady and he loves her; but if she were not a lady and he loved her he would take no care of her at all."

"You know him, then?" asked Peter, innocently.

"Not from Adam," replied Shaun. "A landowner, I should say. Major of cavalry. Yeomanry, of course. Hearty fellow."

"He is a landowner," said Peter, "I think I remember Cynthia telling me." When he came across Phyllis next he tried to discover whether Shaun had guessed right in regard to the stranger's majority. It seemed too wonderful to Peter! But Phyllis neither knew nor cared. "Oh, he's all right!" she dismissed the subject with, rather consciously. As for warnings she would have none of them. "Insult me!" she exclaimed, "Let them dare. You are a silly boy, Peter. Because you're engaged to a beauty you think you know everything!" Peter retired, hurt. He had been deadly shocked at Phyllis, much more so than Shaun, who allowed pretty girls a bohemian latitude in behaviour,

did not disapprove of tights, rather liked contortionists, and called flirting good for the young.

Before leaving the hall Peter encountered Phyllis again, and would have passed her by, but she insisted on his being friendly as she called it, which meant that he had to listen to all she knew about Mr. Adams—for this was the name of her rescuer—his position, which was excellent, and his not unamiable character. She ended up with, "But I mustn't discuss him, Peter, because he wants to marry me, and it wouldn't be nice!"

"Girls lick everything!" Peter informed Shaun.

"Ahem! They aren't good subjects for generalisation," observed Shaun, drily. "I've told you that before."

"She liked talking about him. I noticed that."

"Poor Adams! He *is* a major. I've found that out. Now away to bed, Peter."

"I'm going to walk through Portman Square first. Will you come?"

"Oh, youth!" But he came, and saw the dawn tint the pavement in front of Cynthia's home.

A photograph of Phyllis, entitled *A Society Girl as a Serpent,* appeared in one of her favourite sixpenny weeklies, to the unspeakable horror of her aunt. The paper asked for a portrait in evening dress, and got it. This started Phyllis on a craze for notoriety, and she went in wildly for flying, while her Major steadily lost weight. At this time Cynthia and Peter began to meet at Shaun's rooms, a symptom of desperation. It came out there one day that Laurence Man had discovered the secret engagement. Cynthia revealed this innocently in the course of conversation.

"How?" asked Shaun, before Peter could speak.

"Through the Revel. He saw I'd been crying, and Mother told him why."

"You are sure he did not know before?"

"Quite. Mother said he won't trouble me again."

Peter and Shaun glanced at each other. Shaun said:

"He knows you better than your parents do, Cynthia, after all."

In a tone that gave no clue to her feelings, Cynthia stated, "Mother was angry with me. She did not understand Laurence."

"Come, now, let's have an end of this," said Shaun. "Answer me a few questions, children, will you? and then I'll make a speech. I've got to relieve my mind somehow."

Peter saw that Cynthia's grey eyes were dewy. He answered for her. "Ask away, old Shaun."

"What is your income, Peter?"

"One hundred and twenty-five pounds, excluding drawings. Not much, is it?"

"I did not ask for comments. Private means?"

"Thirty pounds in the bank."

"Rich relatives?"

"None any good."

"I tell you I don't want your comments," barked Shaun in his most irritated voice. "Rich relatives?"

"I have one aunt, my father's sister Janet, who has seven or eight hundred a year. She is a very clever woman of business and made most of it herself on the Stock Exchange. She spends very little, I believe." He stopped short.

"Go on, you exasperating fellow. You mean she's crabbed and hard-headed, and I can guess she did not live on good terms with your father, whom she probably despised, but——"

"Oh, I say, not despised!" interrupted Peter.

" —but I wish to know your own relations with her. When did you see her last?"

"When I was about three years old!"

"When did you last hear from her and from what address?"

"She writes every Christmas from Bath, sends a postal order for ten shillings and tells me to acknowledge receipt on a post-card, as she can't be bothered reading letters." Cynthia laughed irrepressibly; and when she

rippled suddenly like that every single person in the room had to join in.

"I don't know what we are all grinning about," said Shaun at last.

"I'm laughing at you, Shaun dear," she said. "Your fairy godmother is so badly cast! Peter was quite right; now, wasn't he?"

"Quite right to love you. Not necessarily wise in neglecting his rich aunt, Cynthia."

Peter protested: "What on earth can I do, Shaun? She doesn't want to have anything to do with me. She never answers my letters, and I've given up writing to her since Father died. She did not come to the funeral. Aunt May arranged everything; and *she* died soon after him and left her money to a hospital."

"Is Aunt Janet the only relation you've got?"

"Practically."

"Stand down, witness. My apologies for troubling you! A poor man with rich relations lives surrounded by sword-points, which sometimes prick and sometimes proffer cheques and sometimes do both simultaneously! He acquires dexterity in removing the cheques unwounded, or arms himself with pride and stabs in return. There's happiness in neither course; and yet one of the most difficult things in the world is to stroke those sword-points in order to learn which are blunted and have no intention to injure, and which are needle-sharp! Cynthia, one question only for you. How much do you think your people could allow you, and never miss it?"

Cynthia did not know and said so. "I have not the faintest idea, Shaun. I don't know what their income is, even."

"Couldn't you ask, my dear child?"

"No," she said, "I couldn't, I'm afraid, Shaun."

Shaun detected Peter smiling at her encouragingly. "Young ass!" he remarked, briefly. "She has a perfect right to know what expectations she has."

"I do not believe I have any!" exclaimed Cynthia.

"Your father's official income must be close upon £1,500 a year, and he lives at the rate of £2,500, I should

say. There's a margin for private means. However, we'll leave it. You would be aware if there was any money already invested in your name, because the interest would be coming in. What about reversions?''

''Reversions?'' asked Cynthia, puzzled.

''Cynthia and I have talked all this out,'' said Peter, ''and we came to the conclusion that it was unlikely she would inherit money except from her father and mother. We do not think there is anything to be gained by bothering them.''

'' 'Let well alone,' as the dog said when he decided not to steal a steak off the live bullock. I know you think I'm a hopeless sort of a person, Peter. I retaliate by gibes at your youth. I would take the last copper from a blind child, myself, if I needed it to get married. Don't interrupt! You may come to that yet; you can't tell what Providence has in store for you. 'He's a Character!' as my mother's old servant used to chuckle. I was once a beautiful plant covered with a fresh green foliage of illusions and flowering all the year round with brightly-tinted ideals, lovely rose-coloured things. I became a journalist, and withered. You are going to be a journalist too, Peter; and unless Providence bestows upon you an independent income you may wither likewise. I don't advise you to meet withering halfway, but I do recommend you to keep as much as possible out of draughts!''

''You have not really withered, Shaun,'' said Cynthia, quietly. ''You have grown older, and Peter must, too. I would face Father and Mother if I were strong enough, but I'm not. I've tried and I give way when the critical moment comes. Surely, it is better to own up.''

''The girl's growing into a woman!'' cried Shaun, ruffling his hair.

''You see Lady Bremner is easily made ill——'' Peter began to explain.

'' —I saw! Now I'll leave you to yourselves, while I go downstairs and make tea. A tap precedes my entry.''

The conversation had not been quite fruitless. Shaun

dimly foresaw action which he might be called upon to take to enable the boy he had grown fond of to wed this girl he could not altogether cease from loving. A train of thought had been set in motion. He caused them to start apart, by letting slip a cup in the kitchen below, long before tea was prepared. Which was odd, for Shaun was seldom clumsy. And during the remainder of the evening he was inclined to be silent.

XXVIII

A FEW weeks later, on a warm evening in early May, Peter met Cynthia by appointment at the bridge over the Serpentine. He was the first arrival, but contrary to his wont did not start forward to welcome her when he saw her approaching from Alexandra Gate. He stood straight and still.

She had been light-hearted, with the careless joy of youth in sunshine. Now she turned pale and seemed to herself to falter as she drew near, for his soul was in his eyes, and they were agonised. Her own were beautiful. He could see nothing but her deep, compassionate eyes. "Tell me, Peter!" cried the sweet and clear voice that he loved. "Tell your friend, Peter! Darling, what is it?" The pain that had held him as in a vice relaxed at the sound; it lifted, was gone, and left him free to speak.

"Cynthia!"

"Peter, do tell me! You are not ill?"

"No, no. I am sorry. Oh, I've frightened you, my own, my own! Beautiful Girl! That's the right name for you, sweet, sweet Cynthia!"

"I'd sooner be called just your dear chum. Please, Peter, let me try to help!"

"It's these brutes of Directors of ours. They are going to bring in a rule that none of us may marry until he has £200 a year. From the Company, dear! Seven years to wait, unless Laurence Man promotes me!"

"I must walk on. Come with me, Peter. Surely they won't; they can't be so unreasonably cruel. They must allow private means to count! You'll be making £200 the first year you start to sell your drawings."

"Perhaps, with my salary, but oh, Cynthia, they *are* brutes; even though they allowed private incomes to count—and they may—I could not mention that. They don't allow any clerk to engage in a trade or profession outside the Office. Some do and are winked at. *I* couldn't, that's certain!"

"Poor, poor Peter! Yes, they are brutes, and I hate them for what they do to you. I would like to tell them so. At any rate they ought to have given longer notice! When does the rule come into force? How was it announced? Tell me everything."

"Laurence Man read it out to-day. I thought he gave a sneering look at me as he finished. I don't know; probably I'm wronging him. The order will date from the end of next month, after which special dispensations will only be given on the recommendation of the Managing Director, who'll be him by that time, old girl! Don't you see how hopeless it is? His promotion is before the Board now, and he's already acting in the higher capacity. He'll never consent against your people's wishes. It's hopeless! And rotten job though this is, I daren't chuck a safe, regular salary and a pension—and prospects, too, if I were only given a chance! Even Shaun advises against it."

They were passing the lodge in the centre of the park. There was a pleasant view of fresh young grass, tall English elms; and from the distance came the muffled noise of traffic. A robin was piping his poignant-sweet little song; it seemed to shake tears into Peter's heart. He felt them tremble there and rise to his throat. Cynthia's elbow was touching his. He thrilled. They were walking very slowly, entering upon the long path which leads to Cumberland Gate. Suddenly she spoke, in an odd voice, with her face turned away. She was glancing down at the parasol she held in her right hand.

"It's not hopeless, Peter!" she said.

"What do you mean?"

"It isn't hopeless, yet." She did not look at him.

"But how, dear?"

Cynthia stopped and faced him, holding the parasol

in both hands, slender and upright and frank. "I'm not afraid!" she said.

Peter flushed to his forehead. His plain countenance became transfigured. He was the picture of astonishment and joy.

"I'm not!" she repeated, growing pink. She was a lovely lady in that moment; to him aureoled, to the passer-by a very type of fair English girlhood,—he was a considerate passer and he hurried on. The man and the girl neither saw nor heard him. It was as though their souls hovered, questioning, in the air between them. . . .

"My dear!" said Peter, coming back to himself, "I'd love it. I'd give the world if I possessed it, just for that. But could we live on two hundred? And if we could, I have not got it! I mustn't ask you to marry me now."

Her sad eyes darkened, suffused with tears. She said firmly: "Whatever you decide is right, my Peter. We *could* live on two hundred, though. Trust me not to be a spendthrift. I've learnt to cook. I would work, make my own clothes. I'm not afraid!"

"But I suppose we could not possibly manage on £125 a year, and your people would never consent, would they, Cynthia? Oh, I long to, but I know we mustn't."

"I would sooner be married, and tell Father and Mother afterwards," said Cynthia, turning and walking on. "I'm not strong enough to fight against them."

Peter followed. "We could be married and go on living as before," he argued, thoughtfully, "and announce it when we could afford to. The Great Company doesn't know officially anything about my affairs, and they couldn't object when they saw the date of the wedding. It would be rough on your people, but it would make them consent to our being engaged—you know what I mean. It wouldn't matter, then—oh, what is it? I mean they would have to make the best of it."

"That was what I thought of at once," said Cynthia, in a quiet voice. "You don't think me very horrid, do you, Peter? I feel rather ashamed, I don't know why."

"You couldn't be horrid. Did you think of it seriously, then?"

"I said I wasn't afraid!"

"By Jove," said Peter, a new light breaking in on him. He suddenly felt very cool and businesslike. "It's a thing to consider, anyway!"

"And I must go in," said Cynthia. "Don't come any further, Peter dear. Alan is dining at home to-night; he might walk up inside the Park. It would only make trouble if we met him. Good-bye, darling. Really you must go back now." She spoke gravely.

Peter was grave as he replied, "We'll think it over and write. I didn't know I could love you more, but I do." There was a handclasp. Cynthia turned with a little sobbing cry and walked quickly away. Dusk seemed to fall upon the Park, and the air grew cold. When she disappeared among the people passing in and out of the gates, he felt a wrench at his heart like the grip of a savage hand; and as he moved towards the west a chilly breeze struck his face and the last sunlight was fading from the grass. But overhead the sky was clear, flushed with pink that deepened to a rosy splendour as of dawn; and straightway Peter began to whistle.

XXIX

SHAUN had been suffering from fits of morbidness, during which he shut himself up and refused to see Peter. They were not new, these 'bad moods' of his. About once in every month for a space of two or three days he became a prey to depression and secluded himself. The fine, early spring appeared to have affected his nerves unfavourably since frequently of late his door had been closed to his friend. The novelist had warned Peter that creative artists, from the nature of their endowment, were peculiarly open to assaults of the senses upon the imagination; and he himself was an object-lesson in the might of the assailant as he generally emerged from these moods looking shrunk and battered. He rarely slept until the attack was over, instead tramping all night; and he neither wrote nor read. In the daytime he carpentered in an attic.

When Peter presented himself he saw that the climax was successfully past—Shaun was pale but beaming. "Dear old Peter," he began, "I'm conscious I look like a deboshed fish, but I'm my own man again, and rather in love with life as a matter of fact! You may talk about Cynthia for a full half-hour."

Peter responded by eloquence lasting without a break for thirty-seven minutes by the clock on the mantelpiece.

"I was thinking of suggesting that you two should let me announce the engagement in the Press and take the responsibility with Papa," said Shaun. "Secret marriages are all very well in their way, but the absence of wedding presents is a fatal objection in my mercenary eyes."

Peter did not smile upon the amendment. "Are the

Bremners the kind of people to be rushed?" he inquired, in a doubtful tone.

"I think, yes. I have always thought so. I grant that Lady Bremner is obstinate, but I believe Sir Everard to be capable of reason. Of course Lady Bremner would take to her bed if opposed. To my mind that's your strongest argument for a *fait accompli;* and it's the one you have not used. But will the Great Company register you all as either married or single on the date of bringing their rule into force? That would spike your guns, my friend."

"No, they aren't going to do that," Peter assured him. "The rule is horribly unpopular and Man will not do anything likely to make it more so. It's only the marriages after that date which have got to be sanctioned by the Directorate. I'm jolly sure they won't ask any questions about what happens in the next few weeks. All the men think that, and several are going to get quietly married."

"Won't your chums find it odd that you never told them you were married?"

"I don't see why. I never talk about my private affairs, and I really haven't any chums, if it comes to that."

"You'll let them imagine you were living with your wife all the time. Is that the idea?"

"It doesn't matter what they think, Shaun. They may not find out anything at all until quite a long time after the marriage has become known to the Bremners' friends. Laurence Man will know sooner than that, of course, but he can't say anything if Cynthia's people are friendly to us, can he?"

"How is he behaving now? You haven't mentioned him lately."

"I haven't seen you since the Revel, I believe! Oh, he's all right."

"Peter, you seem to have thought this whole thing out pretty carefully, and I'll tell you what I'll do:—I won't condemn your scheme offhand! You and she had better come here on Thursday and talk the proposal out. I

shall have made up what I call my mind by then. You've plenty of time in between to fix up an appointment with her. Send me a postcard."

Accordingly, soon after seven o'clock on Thursday evening, Shaun was lying back in his big arm-chair; having already guessed the decision at which his guests had arrived. They were standing together by the window in a spot where lingered the last sunshine. As he looked on them he knew himself jealous, not for the first time, of the splendour of their youth. Tall, strong Peter was bending forward above the girl, who stood with her rounded chin uptilted ever so little and her hands clasped lightly in front of her. He was disfigured by his office coat, which in his haste he had forgotten to change; it was tight across the shoulders, concealing in place of suggesting his really fine muscular development. But the enchanting girl was dressed so as to display her beauty to the uttermost advantage.

Cynthia had attired herself for the evening, in order to be able to stay till the last possible moment, and on entering she had flung off her cloak. She wore a clinging gown of delicate blue, embroidered with silvery flowers, sleeveless, with straps of pearls; in accordance with the fashion it outlined her slender, young body and limbs. Its colour set off her dazzling white skin, the frail rose of her cheeks, the carmine of her lips, and the rich, brown masses of her hair, bound low above wide, grey eyes. Out of a pardonable vanity she had drawn off her gloves in the cab and her lovely arms and graceful ivory shoulders were wholly bare save for the two pearly bands; she wore no other jewels. Cynthia's eyes were dancing, they were radiant and excited, but when she glanced at Peter there was a steadfastness in her look which told Shaun everything.

"Why isn't she for me?" Shaun asked himself, and thought well-nigh grudgingly of fascinating, elf-like Doris, his wife, who would have appeared plain by the side of this brilliant girl. But her image grew in his heart; and, in place of disparagement, he felt a flood of tears rise suddenly and the old, helpless pain return.

"I love her," he knew. "When I imagined I cared for Cynthia I was only searching, searching for lost Doris, like a child groping in the dark for his mother who is gone away. I was pathetic, because I would not face my tragedy." The last trace of his romantic passion for Cynthia vanished in that instant of self-knowledge. He never forgot again that he was lonely. Memories haunted him until the end.

Aloud he said, "Those who have once loved cannot cease to love, you happy children! Remember before it is too late."

"It *is* too late," said Cynthia.

"If one of you be taken, there is Life for the dead lover, we believe; but for the living only work without comfort, and empty days of waiting and bitter nights of despair."

"It is worth while, Shaun," answered Peter, taking her hands.

"Yes, it is worth it a thousand times, a myriad million times, as much as God Himself is worthy! All who've ever cared for a woman know that He gives Love. Swear that you'll so love each other, Peter and Cynthia!"

"I do!" they cried, with one voice, ringingly.

"Then your spirits are wedded, for I am an artist speaking truth in the presence of God. Get on with your Church ceremony when you please. Leave me to settle up with your parents, or keep it dark—that's for yourselves to decide. I've thought things over. I'm not speaking hastily. I'm responsible for the advice I give. Don't make up your minds here. Think things over separately and remember my cynicism as well as my emotion! You can't afford to live together yet, in my opinion. In your place I'd be patient as to that. But the Great Company is forcing your hands and perhaps it would be well to be married." He was silent, sitting crumpled in his chair, with burning eyes. They waited, now side by side in front of him, glancing at each other awestruck. After a little he said, "The joyful years are those in which you are finding yourself,

children; the years when love is teaching your soul to fly; when you are striving and struggling and making a fool of yourself and learning; the time of development that comes after physical growth, that leads from manhood and womanhood to maturity. Those are the joyful years.''

''And aren't the years after?'' asked Cynthia, wistfully.

''Then you are free to do your work in the world and to help others. No, joy goes, but happiness comes instead.'' He stood up, and said with abruptness, ''Let yourselves out when you go. Do not disturb me!'' and passed into the inner room; from which, through the closed and locked door, came after a little time the sound of stifled sobbing.

XXX

Four weeks, during which Peter did not once meet Cynthia, had dragged slowly away, and they were to be married before the Registrar in the morning. Peter had overcome his agonies of shyness and faced that official; he had made the very simple arrangements necessary and been surprised at their simplicity; he had plunged boldly into a jeweller's on Notting Hill and bought the ring; he had lived in a trance at the office, walked the streets without being aware of the pavement under his feet, suffered Shaun's almost womanly tenderness towards him with a certain amount of embarrassment, and blushed hotly at every mention of Cynthia's name. Now he was upon the back of a roaring monster, speeding, dragon-borne, through dark London streets. The motor-'bus was as unreal as the phenomena of his own existence, or the picture of Cynthia in his memory. He could not believe it existed in the same dimension as himself. Nothing did except the knowledge of his love, and that came seldom close. It concealed itself perpetually round the corner and peeped; a solitary fact in a world of shadows, more actual, however, than the Beloved herself, who in his thoughts often appeared a stranger. It seemed extraordinary that he was going to link his life to that of a beautiful girl stepping out of a dream. The name 'Cynthia' might have been that of a romantic Princess whom he was wedding from lofty reasons of state, so secluded was she from his consciousness, so intrusive seemed this bursting in upon her and claiming her as his own. He could have found it in his heart to pity her had it not been that in his waking life he knew they loved. Sometimes, ah, sometimes, she came close and looked at him with the eyes of the

soul, deep and starry and grey, and then he knew rapture. But it was not the rapture of earth. A lyric of Shaun James, written many years ago during the novelist's boyhood, expressed this aloofness to Peter's mind.

"I have a dream, so piercing sweet,
Of One that lieth at my feet:
Her face, her form I cannot tell,
And yet I know I love her well.

Her voice is distant like the sea;
It draws the soul away from me,
And when I wake and am alone
I know to whom my soul is gone."

That he was not disturbed by the sense of distance between them, was a convincing proof of his love. Yes, it certainly was. He recognised this. But what might she not be suffering now from a similar feeling? She might not have discovered the same consolation.

The 'bus was clearing a way for itself through a crowded East-end thoroughfare, along a line of barrows lit by flares. "What do I know about girls, or how to take care of them?" Peter asked himself. "I'm such an ignorant sort of chap." The thought shaped itself into a prayer. "Please God, help me to help Cynthia. Help me to find out how to do it." Immediately he was thrilled with so strong a sense of her nearness that she might have been seated at his side. His heart went up in a flame of thanks to Almighty God.

Cynthia sat in a little rose-and-white boudoir that Lady Bremner had furnished for her next to her bedroom. She often spent an hour or so there before going to bed. From where she was lying in an easy-chair, her head against a cushion, thick hair loose, hands clasped behind her neck, she could see a reflection of her bare-armed, bare-throated beauty in a mirror which hung upon the wall. Idly she admired her rest-gown of shell-pink silk through which her shoulders gleamed

white and satiny, and "I know he likes my hair," she thought. "I wish there were something to like about me besides my looks. I'm dreadfully unworthy of Peter." She rose with a motion full of the grace which comes from supple strength, and went and stood in front of the glass, stretching out her arms. "It's nice to be beautiful, when one's loved," she thought. "One has more to give. I won't be a drag on him for clothes. I've got more things than I can wear out in twenty years. I wish we could have a home and be married properly; Peter frets so at the waiting. He isn't like me, just happy with being loved. Poor Peter of mine! He has all the worst part, all the anxiety and the hardships. I should like to be married properly if it were only to be able to share them. Somehow it isn't possible to think of what's going to happen to-morrow as marriage! Shaun would laugh, and say I wanted a trousseau and bridesmaids, but it isn't that, it's Daddy and Mummy there and being kind that I want! I should have thought I would be the last girl in the world to marry secretly at a registrar's, it seems much more characteristic of Phyllis,—and yet here it is, going to happen! This is a queer world, and you are not very clever, silly Cynthia, or you would have found it out before. I'm sure the books all say so."

She glided to the door and opened it, passed into the bedroom. "I shall brush my hair myself," she decided. "It would be a shame to fetch back Marie now. Eleven o'clock! Your last night as Miss Bremner, Cynthia. To-morrow I shall be Mrs. Middleton! Oh, my dear girl, I can hardly believe it. I wish I had a sister; it's dull talking to oneself on such an occasion! I feel horribly queer and excited."

She had slipped off the rest-gown. Her pretty white feet shone on the soft black rug by the side of the bed. She was slender and fair as she stood upright for a moment before stooping to the night-dress laid out upon the coverlet. She put it on, and whilst its folds were still in the act of falling dropped suddenly on her knees and buried her head in her hands, shaking her hair over

them and over her face; and her body quivered. "If it were *that,* to-morrow," she was thinking, "should I be afraid? Oh, Peter, Peter, bear with the stupid girl who loves you, and when the time comes, let her be a little afraid! Peter, I do love you!" Her agitation subsided; and now, like Peter, she was praying.

PART TWO

TRANSFORMATION

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TRANSFORMATION

". . . If the love be false and the wings waxen, great is the fall and youth lies shattered. But if the love be of the spirit, then under the hot sun youth undergoes a wondrous change, passing into maturity without descending to the gross earth; and its flight becomes ever more strong, for such winged youth is deathless."—SH. JAMES.

I

THE marriage was to take place at half past eight. Peter woke at five, and by eight o'clock he was pacing up and down in front of the district register office. He gazed at the uninspiring building with wonder at its power. Here was to be brought to pass quite simply and easily what had seemed impossible during a year and a half. Here he was to be married to Cynthia! Little mattered the exterior of the place in the circumstances. He wished himself it had been a church, though Cynthia had not minded. The religion of all the Bremners save Alan, who was keen on forms and ceremonies, was eminently tolerant: it was another proof of her wonderfulness that she had not been shocked at the idea of marriage before a registrar. Peter halted in his promenade in order to admire. She had confessed honestly that she would miss the bridesmaids and music and crowds and excitement. And though she had not said it, how lonely she would feel this morning, leaving her home secretly, all by herself! Without even a girl chum to go with her. She was brave! How plucky she was! He had not realised the magnitude of what she was doing for him. No girl was fonder of

her people. It must be agony for her to leave them. His darling! His poor darling! . . .

"Steady there!" said a voice behind, and Shaun slipped an arm into his and gently drew him away. "I did not expect to find the bridegroom performing balancing feats on the outer edge of the kerb and grimacing like a sick monkey! If you are worrying about Cynthia, stop it at once. Women are much more sensible than men except when they're mad. Most *are* mad, but Cynthia is an exception. She'll arrive sane and cheerful, all her little weeps and grimaces over at home in order not to distress Peter. Bless her! She knows what she's doing, old ass. Come and be ginned up!"

"No, really! I won't have a drink, thanks. I only remembered what a tremendous thing she was doing in consenting to this."

"My remarks still stand, Peter. Here's my wedding present to you both. Shove it in your pocket, don't look at it now; it's only a letter! Mr. and Mrs. Trerice have a small farm between Roughtor and Brown Willy on the Cornish moorland. They are the best people in the world, and can make you uncommonly comfortable at a few hours' notice. No one goes there but me, so you only need to wire, and stay as long as you care to! I pay the bill, see? No thanks, if you please; not a thank! I'm honestly relieved that I'm not going there with Cynthia myself—liar! We should never have suited. Now don't you feel bound to go to Cornwall if you don't want to when the time comes. May that be soon, by the way! Here she is! . . . No, it's the registrar! Shall we keep his taxi? Is it quicker to drive to the City than to go by tube? I'll pay. This is my funeral."

"Tube is quicker," decided Peter.

"All right. No, we don't want you, driver! I've sold a drawing, Peter—just to encourage you and to make the sun shine. Pity it's such a dull morning! Here she is! Early, too. Cream coat and skirt, my boy. Come on, don't be shy; you must go to meet her. I walk in the wrong direction—bye-bye!"

Peter found himself alone, heard through the throbbing in his ears the sound of Shaun's retreating footsteps—they were irregular and excited, a kind of hop, skip and jump—and hurried toward her. The stars in her lovely eyes were sparkling, her dimples played bo-peep. He caught a glimpse of pretty white teeth between the smiling lips. Who was this beauty stepping so lightly and freely, who was this fair young English girl approaching him? She was wearing a small blue hat, and on her breast where the coat was open below her white exposed throat was a bunch of nodding sweet peas, blue and pink, fresh as a dewy morning. Her hair shone coppery against the dark lining of her hat. He knew the rounded chin, those adorably curving lips, the childishness of the smooth oval of the cheeks and their frail glow that came and went; her eyes, wide apart, full of a dancing comprehension under long lashes; the rich hair waved above; her indescribable look of fragrance, all her dainty girlhood and compelling womanhood; but not till she had spoken, saying quietly his name, did he feel that she was Cynthia, his darling! Then when he held out both hands, dazed no longer, she laughed and shook her head.

"I'm not yours till afterwards!" she cried, taking from the pocket of her coat a veil. "I must put this on. I ran so quickly that there was not time!"

"I love you," he said.

"I gathered so!" she smiled, and melted to a madonna look. She had unfolded the veil; and now, lifting her elbows, with busy fingers behind her head she gracefully tied it, and arranged the front with quick deft pats of the hand. "Is that right?" she asked. "It must do."

"I like you in a white veil!" Peter worshipped. Her colour deepened to scarlet.

Shaun's voice came, over the bridegroom's shoulder. "Good morning, dear chum! In a boys' magazine long since defunct but of the highest value during its brief existence, edited by the late G. A. Henty and entitled *The Union Jack*, there was a short story containing a

detective who made use of an admirable catch-phrase, 'Why waste time? That's the p'int!' "

"We're early, Shaun," said Cynthia, hesitatingly. "Ought we to go in?"

"The doors stand open. The enchanter waits within."

She did not move. The two men stared in astonishment. "Peter, I'm rather frightened!" suddenly she cried.

White-faced, he stammered, "Go back, go back, dear, if you wish!"

"No, no, no, I don't wish! I'm only nervous. Peter! My poor Peter!" She clung to his arm, in despair. Shaun glanced about him. Luckily the street was empty. "Children, don't be foolish! Give her your arm, Peter, and follow me." He led the way into the building, without looking round.

In an inner office he found the bearded Superintendent Registrar—the man who had arrived in the taxi—attended by a deferential Registrar of Marriages. The one was seated at a desk with a long narrow volume open in front of him, the other was hovering with documents. "Miss Bremner and Mr. Middleton!" announced Shaun, trusting to goodness that his charges were really there. He wheeled, and with a sigh of relief saw them in the doorway. Cynthia regained her self-possession in the presence of the strangers and managed to return their greetings with her pretty air of dignity, but Peter's voice trembled still. A second witness was summoned by the Superintendent through a speaking-tube; none of the three could afterwards recall his entrance into the room.

Then the Registrar of Marriages administered the declaration to Peter. "I do solemnly declare . . . that I know not . . . of any lawful impediment . . . why I, Peter Middleton . . . may not be joined in matrimony . . . to Cynthia Rosemary Bremner." Cynthia's turn came. Her speaking voice was exquisite as herself, lovelier far than her singing voice; very clear and young and ringing it sounded in the dark office. The Registrar looked at Peter again, "I call upon these persons here present," he said with less haste and more

careful articulation; "I call upon these persons here present," Peter earnestly repeated after him . . . "to witness that I, Peter Middleton,"—"to witness that I, Peter Middleton," . . . "do take thee, Cynthia Rosemary Bremner"—"do take thee, Cynthia Rosemary Bremner," . . . "to be my lawful wedded wife,"—"to be my lawful wedded wife." And Shaun forgot the ring, which was in his pocket. He passed it hurriedly to Peter as the Registrar turned to Cynthia. "I call upon these persons here present . . ." Peter caught her hand and pressed the ring on to the wrong finger. Cynthia murmured, "I call upon these persons here present," gently drawing off the ring, detaining his hand, and making him understand by offering ring and ring-finger. "There's presence of mind for you!" thought Shaun, admiringly, for the Registrar went on unconscious of what was passing below his line of vision; he was standing facing them behind the desk, reading the oath from a printed card.

"Well done!" said Shaun, when it was over.

"Will you kindly sign the Registrar, Mrs. Middleton?" said the old Superintendent with the tone of an actor who had never failed to get his effect from that particular line. Cynthia started; Shaun saw that he had let slip an opportunity; Peter grew redder, if that were possible. "We wish you both every happiness." There were murmurs of thanks and the scratching of pens. Shaun took charge of the certificate. "I suppose with you gentlemen reticence is a professional habit," he said, addressing himself to the older man, whose beard he now perceived to be almost white. He had been under the impression before that it was dark.

"Certainly," was the answer. "I never gossip."

"We were sure of that," said Cynthia, as a princess might have spoken.

Shaun shook hands with the two Registrars warmly. "I knew it!" he said. "I meant no offence. Write me down an ass!"

"I can more easily consider you a great author, sir!" said the old gentleman politely.

"A reader!" cried Shaun. "Come to my arms! But forget me as soon as I get out of the door."

"I will try to do so. Mrs. Middleton, our duty this morning has been a pleasure."

"Thank you!" said Cynthia, charmingly. There was quite a chorus of farewells. Peter came to himself and joined in them. Outside, he glanced at the girl in wonderment. It seemed almost a desecration that he should be the husband of this slender piece of loveliness, this delicately civilised young person. He was conscious of looking clumsy and savage beside her. Again his emotional excitement made him feel aloof—the word defines his condition of mind, which was distinct from shyness or any sense of separation. He enjoyed her as a picture, aided by this curious mental detachment. Never before had he so vividly realised her decorative quality, how ornamental she was; his recent artistic study helped him to imagine for the first time the pleasure which such a girl must find in clothes. He approved the resentment which society must feel towards the poverty-stricken husband of a beauty. He did more than understand, he shared it; and the artist in him blamed the man.

As they marched rapidly to the tube station Shaun talked with apparent inconsequentiality and actual concentration of purpose. He wanted to make Cynthia laugh and to restore Peter his naturalness before the imminent public parting. He was pitying the youngsters from the bottom of his heart. The situation was humiliating for the boy and painfully unpleasant for the girl. Moreover he had partially read Peter's glances and imagined him overcome with self-reproach, which was far from being the case. The painter in the bridegroom had registered a protest, whose justice the rest of his nature admitted; but the man was loving and claiming his wife all the time he walked silent by her side. Excitement had developed Peter to the extent of rendering him capable of duality. For the moment he had ceased to be simple, without losing his strength.

When they reached the buff-coloured entrance with

the narrow sign, *UNDERGROUND,* projecting above it, Shaun said: "Good-bye, children, that 'bus will do for me." But he stayed conversing and the 'bus went by.

"I shall be late," said Peter, presently. He had begun to fidget.

"Only tell me this," said Shaun. "Could either of you describe the officials or the room? Did you notice wall-paper or complexions or furniture or clothes? I want to know for my work's sake."

"There was a tray on the desk with a whole lot of pens on it," said Peter, vaguely. "That's all I remember! Didn't we go up a lot of steps to enter the building?"

"Two," said Shaun. "Now, Cynthia!"

"I remember a dear old gentleman in dark grey with a white beard. Oh, and he had a collar turned down square at the points—you know what I mean—and a navy blue tie. Hadn't the other man a black moustache and a big-jawed kind of look, like Rudyard Kipling? I was much too alarmed to look at the furniture, but there was a calendar on the wall behind the older man's head. He wasn't bald and his hair stood up against it!"

"Go up top," said Shaun, running round her to pursue another 'bus. "Bless you both," was borne on the winds towards them as they wheeled to look after him. He leapt, caught at the rail, waved his arm in a gesture conveying exultation and farewell, and darted inside. The 'bus receded, disappeared.

Suddenly they felt an intolerable loneliness. They belonged to each other and to no one else. They were two waifs, alone in the world, homeless. Cynthia signalled to another 'bus. Separation was an agony, but she feared that rising in her throat. . . . "For Peter's sake. Oh, God, help me to be brave!" . . . She smiled faintly. Peter muttered something, hurried away. The 'bus was slowing, the conductor held out his arm, meaning to make the pretty girl mount running. She ran, and baffled him by the agility of the leap which carried her past his outstretched arm. She flew up the steps without giving him opportunity to touch her. When she looked round at the top Peter was gone. Seating her-

self, she caught sight of her ring with a shock of terror and hastily dragged it off. If she had forgotten that! . . . "Peter, Peter, Peter, I want you so! It is sweet to be yours at last. Oh, my own Peter, if you knew how I love to belong to you!" . . .

Home was strange; but her absence had gone unnoticed. Her parents had chosen to breakfast in their room. She thanked Providence for saving her from the lie that she had ready, and discovered that she was hungry. So she sent her things upstairs and sat down behind the tea and coffee urns, trying to imagine Peter at the opposite end of the table. When she was left alone she slid her hand into the opening of her blouse and drew out cautiously, with timid glances behind at every sound, the thin gold chain she wore, and added to it the circlet from her pocket, and slipped it in again. Then as she felt the unwonted chill and lumpiness of two rings nestling together between her breasts against the soft bare skin under shelter of lace camisole and ninon and scented sweet peas, she laughed out loud a peal of childish laughter, and laughed again and again. "It isn't every girl who wears both engagement and wedding rings round her neck," she thought, overcome by the ludicrousness of the idea. And then all at once she became grave and sat meditative; no longer a girl, but a very beautiful woman.

. . . . . .

Peter arrived at the office three minutes late. "Missed your train, Middleton?" blandly inquired the High Official who guarded the attendance-book. He knew perfectly well that Peter made the journey by tube, so that this was the one excuse which was not available.

"I'm very sorry to be late, sir," answered Peter, who would have been wiser had he satisfied Mr. Martin's curiosity by inventing a chapter of accidents. Resentment of the trap apparently laid for his unwariness caused him to be gruff, which was another mistake. His cue was to be alarmed and apologetic and voluble.

"Try not to be late, Middleton!" said Mr. Martin with elaborate gentleness. He meant: "Do not add the

insult of a sullen demeanour towards your superior to the offence of defrauding the Great Company of three minutes of time which they have paid for! Cultivate tact, as I do. Love, honour, and obey all High Officials. Fear the Managing Director. Always answer as you are expected to answer. Beware of independence of mind. Young man, I begin to suspect you! My feelings are hurt because you did not understand the subtle rebuke contained in my question about your train. I am aggrieved, and I will pay you out for it." Accordingly when Peter returned to ask where he was to work, as his name did not appear in the usual place, Mr. Martin, parting his thin lips, breathed in a benignant manner the name of Mr. Lemon, "who commenced the morning with a heavy day's work to dispose of, so you had better hasten to Department B, Middleton!"

Cynthia was forgotten. Peter had been upon the mountain tops, and the atmosphere of the Great Company enveloped him like a thick mist. He concentrated his faculties on making a safe descent. "All the same Brown has a great deal more to do than Lemon," he thought. "Oh, lor, this place! I set my large flat foot in it when I offended Martin! Going to that old fiend with a black mark against me means a jolly unpleasant day. I won't think of anything but the work until I get away." An excellent resolution, but not so easy to keep when one has been married only one hour. However, Peter's motto was, "Dogged does it."

"Come to join you, sir," he said as he entered a small room—the Great Company's offices consisting of a very large number of intercommunicating small rooms, each containing a separate department, amongst which the staff was distributed as necessity arose—and found himself in the presence of a large, clean-shaven man, with a handsome, beaked, dead-white face, who was seated at a roll-top desk by the window. This was "The Infamous John Lemon," as Semple had christened him after the name of a novel he had read; a sneak, a liar, and a hypocrite; a drug-taker; who was supporting a woman to whom he was not married and for whom he was making provision

by a determined series of self-sacrifices which came to light three months later when he shot himself in the lavatory of Department B. It was known to the staff that "Infamous John" had a mistress. The existence of a virtue in him remained unsuspected until he was dead.

"Come to join the busy B's?" rumbled Mr. Lemon, opening a mouth like a fish's, and beaming with false jocularity upon Peter. "Now we can look the whole hive in the face. Make honey under Mulholland, my dear Mr. Middleton! Make *much* honey!"

Peter disposed of his cap, and crossed the room to a double row of desks topped by brass rails. Mulholland was beckoning from the second row, the 'Cons.' O'Brien, the countryman, instructor of youth in the domestic habits of field-mice, was the only friend in sight. He was in the middle of the 'Pros.' Blotter was flattening himself upon the second desk of the 'Cons': he was a picture of industry, with tongue out and elbow working convulsively as he wrote. The appalling Kilworth, a dissolute young man with a remarkable memory for dirty stories and rhymes, was No. 3. Peter took his place as No. 4, and Mulholland immediately came round to him.

"For the Lord's sake, Middleton, get on with it!" he whispered. "We're behind already; from yesterday. How Lemon expects me to keep things going I don't know. That fellow Blotter they make such a fuss about is little better than a shirk, and your neighbour is worse. Dig into the contents of that basket, old man! I rely on you to pull us through!"

That was the way to talk to Peter Middleton. He dug furiously and cleared the basket in an hour, which was quicker than Mulholland himself could have done it—a senior man drawing twice his salary. Like everyone else outside the ranks of the High Officials he had the greatest admiration and liking for Mulholland, who was a gentleman, a famous amateur boxer, and a first-rate man at his job, though now broken down through ten years of subordination to 'Infamous John.' He had seen himself passed over for promotion again and again, had been spied upon, subjected to petty insult.

"He was too straight," the clerks said. He was. He had differed in policy from Laurence Man, and told Mr. Lemon the truth about himself.

Mr. Lemon retired about eleven o'clock, and a babble of conversation broke out.

"Shut up, you chaps!" said Mulholland. "The very walls have ears here. Get on with the work, please."

"What's the origin of 'Pro' and 'Con'?" O'Brien was asking in front. No one knew. He turned to inquire of Mulholland.

"I daresay they knew a hundred years ago. I don't."

Kilworth began to chant:

"There was an old Bishop of Birmingham . . ."

"Shut up!" said Mulholland. "Not while I'm here."

Blotter was arguing with a New Entrant, a rosy, chubby-faced boy. "If we don't like it, why do we stay?" he was demanding with the air of one giving a triumphant display of intelligence. Mulholland interposed—"Because we are prisoners of our own folly or greed or cowardice, I imagine," said he. "A few fellows who have ties of marriage or filial affection might be called prisoners of honour. Now you know, you can get on with the work, Blotter. You're beastly slow!" Blotter looked hurt.

Then Mulholland went to Peter. "Ledger Six wasn't posted yesterday. I wish you'd do that for us next."

"What's the good of the thing?" grumbled Peter. "All right. I suppose it must be done." A Ledger Six was ordered to be kept in every office of the Great Company as a duplicate record of the more important transactions of the day. These ledgers were collected every evening and wheeled across the street on a truck to the Safe Deposit opposite. During a hundred and fifty years there had been no fire in the buildings occupied by the Great Company and not a single Ledger Six had ever been required for reference, which was fortunate, as many of them were empty and certainly not one properly posted. In fact, Ledger Six was a

solemn farce. No High Official dreamed of opening or checking one, and Ledger Six was the only book in the office in which it was safe for a bad writer to work rapidly. No clerk had ever been 'downed' on the evidence of Ledger Six,—not even by Mr. Lemon, with whom it was a positive pleasure to get men into trouble. Peter collected the slips and moved to the green-covered book marked 'Six.'

"Hullo, it's a new one!" he said.

"Three days old," said Mulholland. "They issued new books all round, I believe. Be as quick as you can, Peter, old man."

Blotter had opened the ledger, and had evidently made it an excuse for 'hanging on,' for the entries were in beautiful copperplate. Peter ran his eye down the page and guessed that they would not bear close examination as to accuracy; still, regarded as an exercise in handwriting, nothing could be prettier. He was faced with a problem. If he imitated Blotter the work of the 'Cons' would drift still farther behind and Mulholland, whom he liked, would get into trouble. He, Peter, was supposed to be a 'quick man'; that is to say a man who worked hard and swiftly, taking the attendant risk of incorrectness. Now that he was married it was clearly his duty to become a 'slow man.' Besides, he was too clear-sighted to fail to recognise the essential immorality of neglecting a duty because other people had done so before him. Hay anyone save Mulholland been in question, he would not have hesitated; as it was, to write up that valueless ledger with honesty seemed uncommonly like saving his own soul at the expense of someone else. That Mulholland would not reproach him for doing the work properly and so landing the 'Cons' in still further arrears, was certain. That he did not count on its happening, was equally sure.

It is probable that Peter's decision to be selfishly honest was influenced also by distrust of Mr. Lemon, who wore a particularly sly and greasy air that morning. At any rate, he commenced to copy with correctness; and the first few entries were in the style of handwriting

which the Great Company desired to impose upon its clerical staff. A round, unformed hand was the ideal of the Directorate. An ϵ would have caused the High Official who discovered it to have a fit upon the spot. A handwriting with character in it—except the character of a clerk—was anathema, and its owner a thing accursed.

Peter was beginning to write rapidly in his natural hand, which was legible and ugly; when O'Brien turned and placed on his desk an enormous bundle of vouchers.

"What's this?" asked Peter.

"You've got to post the 'Pros' work as well as your own," said O'Brien. "It's a new rule, my boy."

"Is that right?" Peter called to Mulholland.

"I'm sorry to say it is."

"That's the limit!" thought Peter. "Holly will be absolutely up a gum-tree if I spend the whole day over these infernal vouchers. He increased his speed, albeit with inward misgivings, and began to turn over five or six at a time instead of one, and to leave out many names from those he did copy. In another half hour he was finishing, and still Lemon had not returned. It was evident that Ledger Six had not been taken into consideration when the work was shared out. Indeed this did not happen in any office, which caused a conscientious person like Blotter to be a thorn in the flesh of the Senior Clerk, who got most of the blame if the work were behind; the High Official usually managing to shift his responsibility to the shoulders of his subordinate.

Now a pasty-faced, stout boy of eighteen came in from the next room and called out, "Who's doing Ledger Six?"

"A———badly bitten by a———badger!" Kilworth informed him, for this was the victim of the fieldmouse hoax. "Sick 'em, Jones!"

"No, is it you?" inquired young Jones innocently of O'Brien.

"I have indeed been bitten by a badger——" began O'Brien, with intense gravity; but Peter interrupted.

"—I've just finished," he said. "What is it, Billy?"

"Semple told me to come, in case you hadn't heard."

"Heard what?"

"He said Lemon was such a mean old devil he might not tell you. Did he?"

"Tell me what, you young ass?"

"Man is coming round to-day to inspect the Ledger Sixes in every office."

"What!"

"It's a fact! One of the Highos heard him arranging it with Lemon."

"That simply isn't possible, Billy. You're having me on."

"I'm not, on my honour! He walked in with Lemon this morning,—Man did, I mean. Anyway, however it leaked out, he's coming!"

"What time?"

"How should I know, man?"

"Good Lord!" said Peter.

A big voice rumbled from the doorway. "Good-morning, Master Jones! It's a pleasure to see you, don't hurry away! He's gone! What a singular youngster!" Lemon panted to his desk and settled there. He was very short of breath this morning. "Mulholland! Ledger Six and its vouchers, if you please."

"Not finished yet, sir," said Mulholland readily, with a side-glance at dumbfounded Peter.

"Never mind, Mr. Mulholland, never mind! Let me have them at once, please, finished or unfinished."

Peter had no choice but to carry them across. He knew now that he was lost.

"Ah, it's Peter Middleton! Lay them down here, Peter. Many thanks! Our Acting Managing Director, Mr. Laurence Man"—he rolled the name on his tongue—"proposes to inspect Ledger Six this morning. He has just told me so, and perhaps a little preliminary examination on my part would be judicious. . . . Go back to your desk, Middleton," he concluded sharply.

Peter went. It was a dream that a few hours ago he had been married to Cynthia. He did not see the sympathetic faces of 'Pros' and 'Cons' as he passed

by. He understood everything, saw that he was trapped. He even knew where Laurence Man was at this moment. He was in Department A, just far enough distant to enable Mr. Lemon to check the Ledger before he should arrive.

Mulholland acted promptly and with decision. He took a paper for Mr. Lemon to sign, and asked a question about the potting of fuchsias. The High Official would not be drawn into conversation. He continued to work with greedy swiftness.

"Your handwriting is disgraceful, Middleton," he called across the room.

"Anything worse than handwriting?" whispered Mulholland.

"Of course," said Peter.

"Sorry, old man! I'm beastly sorry."

"It wasn't your fault, Holly. Don't let yourself in, for goodness' sake. One's enough for them to down. Lemon knows now. Look at him grinning."

"Poor old———!" said Kilworth, patting Peter on the back.

"Damn you, shut up!" whispered Peter.

Laurence Man entered, in morning clothes with violets in his buttonhole. He was tall, good-looking, and well-made; but his impressiveness was marred by his thin, uninspiring voice. He was frowning. "Good-morning, gentlemen!" he said, irritably. "Ah, you are there, Mr. Lemon!" Lemon rose and greeted him and spoke rapidly in a low tone. "Certainly!" said Laurence, with raised eyebrows. . . . "Yes, yes, by all means, Mr. Lemon. I will deal with it at once." The audience with one exception was affecting to be engrossed in work.

"You are not working, Middleton," remarked Laurence, stopping on his way to the door in front of the 'Pros,' who instantly lowered their eyes to their books like a row of schoolboys surprised by the headmaster.

A slow fury was rising in Peter. "No," he acknowledged in a dull voice.

Laurence nodded to Mulholland. "Give him some-

thing to do!" he said, and went out. A moment later Mr. Lemon followed with the ledger and vouchers.

"Sack for you, Peter!" said Kilworth. "I wouldn't be in your shoes."

"Look at 'Old Them'!" said O'Brien.

Blotter was white and trembling. "What's the matter with you, you rabbit?" asked Kilworth.

"I hope they don't check mine!" quavered the virtuous apprentice.

"You needn't be afraid!" said Peter, bitterly. "They won't check back. They know too much for that. It would let in too many people and make a scandal. No, they'll pretend I'm the only villain in the place—if the other offices have got their ledgers right, as they probably had time to do. Besides, they can't check back! Yesterday's vouchers are all sorted up."

"Much Man would care for that!" said Blotter. "He wouldn't mind how much work he gave!" He buried himself disconsolately in his ledger.

"You're in charge while I'm away, Blotter," said Mulholland in a brisk tone, taking off his office coat.

"I say, don't," begged Peter. "Really you can't do any good, Holly! It wasn't your fault. Don't you see they've got me fixed? Besides, Man has got a grudge against me, a private one." Mulholland whistled and sat down.

"Sorry, Peter," he said, drawing on his coat. "He won't listen to me, then."

Young Mainwaring, the bumptious youth whom Peter had encountered in the courtyard on his return from leave, now put in an appearance.

"The Managing Director wants specimens of Middleton's handwriting in the ordinary work of the office," he said superciliously to Mulholland. "I suppose you're in charge he-ah?"

"You'll have to go to Brown," said Mulholland. "This is Middleton's first day in this office for months."

"Oh, all right!" said the youth, and vanished.

Half an hour passed, which Peter for Mulholland's sake spent in work. A quantity of people came in to

sympathise and got short answers for their pains. Most of them were only curious; Semple was genuinely moved. They discussed the probable punishment, congratulating themselves on their own escape. O'Brien joined Mulholland in the task of disposing of them one by one. It appeared that three more men had been 'run up' on account of handwriting, two from D and one from H; all had been reprimanded on the spot by 'Lordly Laurence' and told they would hear of it further. Peter remained the principal scapegoat, and it was entirely a matter for Laurence's generosity what should be done with him. These well-meaning babblers intensified the agony of the time of waiting. "Get out, you inquisitive fool," ordered Mulholland at regular intervals, and O'Brien went on saying, "Leave Peter alone. Clear out of the office at once," but they could not do more than keep the procession on the move.

Semple returned at about twenty minutes after twelve to give a message from Mr. Brown. "You might slip in and see Brown," he said to Peter. "I'd change my office coat if I were you. I daresay he'll take you to the Managing Director. I know he's been speaking up for you."

Peter called to Mulholland. "Brown wants me!"

"Good luck to you, Peter. Come back as soon as you can."

Mr. Brown wore a sad and serious face. His short-sighted blue eyes peered towards the door as the two clerks entered his office. Then he beckoned, calling, "Mid-dleton. Come here, if you please!" Peter approached, and the kind old man said in a low voice, "You have done very wrong, Mid-dleton; I am afraid you will suffer for it very se-verely. I have done what I could. I was able con-scientious-ly to speak most highly of your work and I know more of you than does Mr. Lemon or Mr. Mar-tin. You will un-derstand how much I am trusting you when I say that I was asked to reconsider my good report in view of others less favourable. I fear it is intended to make an ex-ample, Middleton. I wish to warn you not to at-tempt to ex-cuse that for which there can be no excuse! Mr. Man is

just; and he will be in-fluen-ced by your good record if you ad-mit your fault."

"There's always been laxity in regard to Ledger Six, sir!" said Peter. "It ought to have been checked. Why should I be made a scapegoat for the whole staff? There's a chap in another Department who remembers Mr. Man himself entering a lot of riddles in the ledger."

"That may or may not be so, Mid-dleton. I doubt it. Mr. Man asked me whether I had ever neg-lected to post Ledger Six either as a junior or in after-years, and I told him no. He did not ask me my ex-perience of others. Be warned by me, Mid-dleton, and do not attempt to give yours. And, my boy, if your punishment is very hard, re-member that there is One Above Who sees all things; Who is merciful and swift to for-give. You will find com-fort if you take your trouble to Him. Now go and tell Mr. Mul-holland that Mr. Lemon is gone to Coutts' Bank and will not be back until after lunch, and that you are to re-port yourself at the Managing Di-rector's office at one."

"Thank you, sir," said Peter.

Laurence kept him waiting forty minutes in the lobby, in the company of two gorgeously-liveried porters, while Peter's mind whirled in unceasing, useless revolutions like those of a squirrel within the wheel of its cage. He was a prisoner like the squirrel. He was caught in a trap from which there was no escape. He could only defend himself by implicating others. His sole hope lay in the generosity of Laurence Man, who did not know the meaning of that quality. The most immoral part of the whole business was its entire lack of necessity. Laurence had only to say to the High Officials, "See that Ledger Six is carefully checked in future after being written up. I remember when I was a junior it was not properly kept and I intend to alter that. The responsibility is yours as Heads of Department. I shall examine the books myself from time to time," and his purpose would have been served. But what had happened was characteristic of the Great Company, whose policy was to rule by terror. Peter could not believe that

any of the High Officials had been unaware of the valuelessness of Ledger Six as a record. Yet they had escaped, while he the most junior person involved (but, as he was inclined to forget, the actual offender) was about to endure the whole weight of the Company's wrath. The injustice of it brought the blood to his cheeks and for a moment made him feel physically sick. As the long minutes ticked themselves away his resentment grew side by side with his fears. At last Laurence's bell sounded within the great mahogany doors and one of the porters hastened to answer it.

Peter rose, with a sense of bodily fatigue, when he heard his name called, and passed through the doorway feeling as though his footsteps stumbled. There was a purring sound and a slight click behind him as the porter shut him in with Laurence, and then ensued a long silence while the latter stooped over page after page of a stitched foolscap report which lay open in front of him.

The Managing Director's office was a large, square room lighted by two very lofty windows; it had massive mahogany furniture and a Wilton carpet of deep sombre purple, thick-piled, noiseless to the feet. Laurence was seated at a writing-table whose polished rails began to shine dazzlingly. Peter saw him now through a bar of light filled with dancing motes and, thus lit, his regular features had a saintly beauty until he raised his head and the thinness of his lips became evident.

At length he sat back in his padded revolving-chair and stared at Peter, who was standing beside a 'visitor's' arm-chair covered with green pegamoid. The chair was on Peter's right hand, slightly forward; his downcast eyes were wearily examining the texture of the leather.

"Middleton!" said Laurence, sharply. Peter looked up at him with set face.

"You were, I suppose, aware of the purpose for which Ledger Six was ordered to be kept?"

"Yes, sir."

Laurence gave him no time to add to the simple affirmative which was his condemnation. "And therefore of its importance and value. I find certain entries made in

your handwriting under to-day's date in the Ledger Six belonging to B Department. Do you acknowledge them?"

"Yes."

"They are incorrect and incomplete. Do you admit this?"

"I suppose I must."

"Do you or do you not admit it, Middleton?"

"Yes, I do."

"It is clearly unnecessary to ask you whether your fault was wilful, for unless it were so you would not be able to make the admission you have just made." Peter was silent. Laurence did not take his eyes from his face. "Do you confess that you posted Ledger Six incorrectly and incompletely, knowing what you were doing, intending your entries to be incorrect and incomplete?"

"I haven't denied it, have I?"

"I don't want to know whether you have denied it. I want to know whether you acknowledge it."

"Well, I do, but——"

"Stop, Middleton! You will not make things better by attempting to excuse yourself. You have been false to the trust which your employers put in you——"

"Certainly not!" interrupted Peter, boldly. Laurence's eyes narrowed to slits and then opened wide; he glanced down, picked up an ebony paper-knife from the desk and twisted it about in his fingers. If he was disappointed there was no sign of it in his manner, which was bored and indifferent.

"Worse and worse," said he. "I have warned you."

Peter hesitated, then he said in a bitter tone, "It's no good. You've got me fairly trapped, sir. I can't defend myself without letting someone else in."

"Do you allege that Mr. Mulholland instructed you to falsify Ledger Six?" asked Laurence smoothly, without looking up.

"No, I don't. I do say though that the Ledger ought to have been checked and never was."

"So do I!" said Laurence, sitting up and throwing down the paper-knife. "I have said it pretty emphatic-

ally! But that is no defence to you. On the contrary, it proves that great dependence was placed on your honour. Others appear to have seen it in that light, for I found no incorrectness in the Ledgers Six of the rest of the Departments. What? What is that? Do you wish to say anything?"

"No," said Peter, sullenly.

"You will understand of course that our private acquaintanceship cannot stand in the way of my doing my duty. I have examined your record. It is unsatisfactory as to handwriting. I note that reports have been called for on five occasions, and your writing in this Ledger Six is a disgrace to the Company. Mr. Brown alone among the High Officials speaks well of your work. I am afraid it is my duty on behalf of the Directorate to give you a month's notice from this date. I am sorry that this should have happened to you, Middleton——"

"That's a lie!" said Peter, white and trembling. "You're damned glad!"

Laurence broke into a smile, glaring at him. He rang the bell on his desk. "Tell the Cashier," he said to the porter who came in, "with my compliments, to have Mr. Middleton's salary calculated up to date ready for him in ten minutes' time. That is all." When the man was gone he said to Peter in a tone of rising fury, "You are dismissed at once, with disgrace. You don't give me credit for honesty. Your conceit won't let you think I really disapprove of you as a clerk. Why, you fool, I would stamp your type out of business life altogether if I had the power to do it! I'd dismiss every solitary one of you without compunction. From the point of view of the man who has to depend on your work you're all silly, sentimental incompetents! Even if you had not been Peter Middleton—Peter Middleton!"—his voice shook on the repetition of the hated name—"I would have got rid of you for what you have done to-day. Go! Go!" He pressed the bell again and again, leaning forward over his desk with a face of passion. Once more the door opened behind Peter and this time he turned and stumbled out of the room.

II

PETER stood in the corridor outside the entrance to the Cashier's office, stood and shivered like a man in a fever. He was seeing red, and all the time his underconsciousness was reminding him that he alone was to blame. He had chosen to take the risk and now he must pay the penalty, though his accomplices numbering nine-tenths of the staff of the Great Company escaped scot-free. He had known perfectly well that the High Officials whose connivance had rendered possible the general neglect of Ledger Six did not possess the courage or the honesty to take open responsibility for it if detected, also that Mr. Lemon in particular was capable of the meanest treachery to his staff, also that the Managing Director's sense of fairness was not a highly developed characteristic, all of which things had increased the risk he was taking. Also he had known that his action in assisting Mulholland at the expense of Ledger Six was ethically indefensible in spite of the valuelessness of the Ledger. He had sacrificed his own honesty for a man who would never have asked for the sacrifice although unable to conceal that he was hoping for it; and no one in the world would understand! There was a vague impression in his mind that somewhere or other people existed who might sympathise, but he could not remember who they were. He was seeing red, longing to thrash Lemon before leaving the building for the last time. The old devil! If only he were younger, younger, younger! To feel the crushing impact of one's fist against the flesh and bones of his face; to see him falling in a heap, lying outstretched while someone counted . . . eight: nine: ten! . . .

Semple passed by in a hurry; but glancing round saw Peter and turned. "Old chap!" he exclaimed. "You look ——— queer!"

"I'm sacked!" said Peter.

"Poor old boy! I was afraid they had you fairly caught! Really, I'm sorry, awfully sorry."

"Take the key of my desk and give it to"—he could scarcely bring himself to say it—"to Lemon, will you, and get my hat. I'm not going into the office. I should tell him off if I did, and he wouldn't understand. . . . He isn't worth it."

Semple would have liked to be present at a telling-off of Lemon, but good feeling towards Peter prevailed and he did the errand without making any attempt to alter his decision. Also he was considerate enough not to bring back with him a crowd of curious sympathisers. When he returned Peter was inside drawing his salary. He came out looking like a stone image, as Semple said afterwards, took the hat, shook hands and went off without a word. Semple watched him out of sight, then went on up to lunch, whistling.

Meanwhile Peter had passed through the familiar archway into the street and was walking steadily towards the west, his mind benumbed. The circumstances of his downfall were present in his sub-consciousness. He knew of them but could not think about them. He turned mechanically into an A.B.C. in Newgate Street and ordered a cup of coffee, and having drunk it he was conscious of hunger and asked for beef-steak pudding, although there seemed to him something peculiarly ludicrous and dreadful in eating beefsteak pudding after what had happened. The natural actions of life were no longer natural, he felt; with a sudden flow of self-pity, followed by an aching need for sympathy. Who would understand, forgive a man dismissed peremptorily, turned out in disgrace as he was? Who? Who? Quite automatically his mind told him Cynthia and Shaun, two names without identity for an instant; and then they became a single name which had identity and Peter Middleton started back on the red plush seat, thinking in horror of Cynthia, his wife.

Yes, Cynthia would understand,—she loved him; his first impulse was to telephone without delay and satisfy

his agonised longing to hear her voice. One consideration restrained him. The Bremners' telephone was in the hall and the hour was nearly that of lunch, so Cynthia's words might be overheard; moreover, it might be difficult to get her to the instrument, as Lady Bremner liked to answer telephone calls. Lady Bremner was leaving London in the evening, she was travelling by the night train to the north; late in the evening would be the time to speak to Cynthia. A moment afterwards he was thanking God that his first selfish instinct to share his trouble had been checked; Cynthia must not know until he had consulted Shaun. Now Peter began to realise how what he had done had wronged her. He paid his bill, passed out into the street, and went and hid himself in the only place where a man may be altogether alone in a city, and when the door was bolted was shaken by a terrible sobbing which left him weak and faint. As he went out the attendant stared at him, following to the steps, but did not speak; and Peter hurried at his best pace towards Shaun's lodgings.

Shaun was not in, and Peter made his way through the busy, sunshiny streets to the Adelphi and entered the lobby of the Savage Club. The porter gave one glance at him and said, "Mr. James has not been here to-day, sir." Peter thanked him and went. It was clear that all trace of Shaun was lost, and he could think of nothing better to do than to go home and write to Cynthia. Even though he did not send the letter the writing, the pouring out of himself, would be a relief.

On the 'bus the beauty of the day seemed an irony, the unfamiliar aspect of the pavements of Piccadilly struck him with a kind of wonder. Outside St. George's Hospital a collision appeared inevitable and the passers-by called out in alarm. Peter did not lean forward, although it was his vehicle which was in peril and at fault; he felt a dull disappointment when the crash did not come, and had forgotten the incident before the shouting ceased.

It was close on three o'clock when he dismounted in front of Barker's and crossed the road to Church Street.

The bells of St. Mary Abbot's were ringing; there were carriages at the gate and a crowd gathered in the churchyard and outside. He scarcely glanced at them, and passed on towards his own tall house at the corner of a side-turning on the left: his rooms were at the top overlooking the Barracks, high above the traffic, giving the occupant a delightful sense of space and seclusion. He stared up at his window as though he expected to see a face there,—his own or Cynthia's, in his vague, strange thoughts,—and coming back to reason moved to the front door, which was up the side-street, let himself in and climbed the steep staircase, familiar and yet oddly unfamiliar since he was looking at it with new eyes. He noticed the dusty yellow and black of the oil-cloth beneath his feet and could not concentrate enough to form a clear impression of the pattern, which altered on the top landing,—or was it merely that the light was brighter, or the linoleum newer and less worn? Before he could decide he was in his sitting-room and had become aware of a letter on the table.

He picked it up and held it in his hand a moment before looking at it. Then, having opened it, he took off and threw down his straw hat and seated himself before the table. The letter was not from Cynthia. The typewritten address had told him that.

Dear Sir, it began. Peter glanced overleaf at the signature. *West, Hawkins and Bere* told him nothing, nor did the address of the firm, which was a street in Bath.

Dear Sir,

We are instructed by a client to place at your disposal the sum of five hundred pounds sterling (£500) *on receiving from you in writing an honourable undertaking to comply with the following two conditions.*

(1) *Not to attempt to discover the name of the donor.*

(2) *Should the identity of the donor be guessed or accidentally revealed, not to express thanks and not to refer to the gift directly or by implication.*

On our receiving from you such an undertaking clear-

ly expressed, property in the above named sum (five hundred pounds) will become vested in you, and we shall be glad if you will favour us with your instructions as to disposal.

In conclusion, we beg to state that our client has entrusted us with a message, which we transmit verbatim. 'This gift may be regarded as an act of restitution and does not call for gratitude. Nothing more is to be expected from the same quarter.'

Awaiting your instructions, which shall be promptly carried out.

We remain,
Yours faithfully,
West, Hawkins and Bere.

PETER MIDDLETON, ESQ.,
127b, Church Street,
Kensington, W.

The walls swam round before Peter's eyes as he looked up from the paper. His heart sang with joy. When he had recovered his self-possession a little he heard himself repeating, "Joy cometh in the morning! Joy cometh in the morning!" in a rush of happiness and thanks to God which was almost terrible in its intensity, conveying to his mind the measure of his former despair. He did not doubt he had guessed the name of his benefactor,—it could be no one but Aunt Janet, who alone of his acquaintance lived at Bath. Moreover she had not been on good terms with his father and Peter knew that the disagreement between them had originated in a matter of business. The recollection of this was fresh in his memory because Shaun had questioned him fairly closely about his rich aunt, and he had been careful to withhold from his friend the fact that his father had considered himself wronged, the knowledge of which Major Middleton would have wished his son to keep to himself. Peter knew no details of what had happened in the past.

It was just possible that Shaun had written to Aunt Janet to plead with her. He would ask him that, although he was sure what the answer would be. Indeed

Shaun did not know the old lady's address in Bath. No, Aunt Janet had done it of her own accord, and it was splendid! Peter felt as a man might who perceived the sun burst out unnaturally in a stormy sky and flood the world with light. He marvelled. And went on wondering for several minutes before it occurred to him that the paper he was twisting between his fingers contained power. Five hundred pounds! That was two hundred pounds for two years and one hundred pounds over, or one hundred and fifty for three years and fifty pounds over,—it meant Cynthia! And full of joy, without pausing to think, he rushed for writing materials and wrote two letters. The first was addressed to West, Hawkins and Bere, and the second ran as follows:

Darling,

I have got the sack from the Great Company, my own fault and I can never forgive myself, but in a way it does not matter, as Aunt Janet has sent five hundred pounds. Darling I love you and I'm so excited I can't write properly. Will you be at Waterloo under the clock to-morrow with luggage at 10.45 *a.m. to go to Camelford to a place Shaun knows of, will you darling?*

Peter.

Without re-reading it he sent this off by the hand of his landlord's little son, entreating him to hurry, and began to look for the memorandum which Shaun had given of the address of the farm on the Cornish moor. In vain he hunted in drawers and strong-box and writing-case, his confusion of mind being so great and the events of the early morning so apparently distant that moments passed before it occurred to him to search in his own pockets, where the paper was immediately found. "I was married to-day!" he said aloud in the shock of his surprise, and then, attacked by sudden restlessness, ran downstairs and out. After telegraphing to Cornwall he rang up the Bremners from the Post Office, and a feminine voice told him that Miss Bremner was not at home. Recognising the mother's voice he trembled,

thanked her and rang off. He felt relieved to remember the disguised handwriting on the envelope of his letter. Why had he been so impatient? Why had he not waited until Lady Bremner was gone? How horrible were these disguises and subterfuges! He did not know whether what he had done was bold and wise, or colossally selfish. A legion of doubts assailed him. To escape from them he taxied to Panton Street and was fortunate enough to find Shaun in.

Shaun steadied him with a cup of tea, listening with a very serious face. When Peter had talked himself to a standstill, he said, "Man would have found an excuse to sack you in any case sooner or later. That place was no good, Peter. It's odd to think of that five hundred lying at home all the while; rather an effective situation, I think."

"I say, Shaun," interrupted Peter. "Did you ask Aunt Janet to help me?"

"Should I tell you if I had? As a matter of fact I did not, Peter, although I admit it has once or twice occurred to me to do so. You are such a transparent fellow that I guessed what you've just told me about her relations with your father and argued that to expect generosity from her would be a waste of time. So much the better that I was wrong!"

Peter was satisfied, and Shaun went on, "As for the Great Company I think you are well out of it. Your position there was a false one. Of course the manner of your exit was not the happiest; but I doubt whether Laurence Man will make much use of it with the Bremners. I think you are foolish to blame yourself as much as you do. By the way, were you in a state of uncertainty for one instant whether Cynthia would immediately understand and never dream of thinking forgiveness needful, never doubt you, never blame you, only love you the more?"

"No. Though I knew I did not deserve it."

Shaun regarded him thoughtfully, with his head on one side. "I think you two will be all right," he said after a little consideration. "I won't interfere with

this mad idea of cutting and running. But, Peter! Have you realised what a shock you've given the girl? She'll very likely get your letter while her mother is still in the house!"

"She never opens letters in public, Shaun. I don't know! Now that I think of it, yes, it *does* seem rather colossal cheek to ask her to come away with me at a moment's notice! It seemed natural enough as I did it. I can't imagine what I was thinking of. Dear old Shaun, *have* I been a brute to her?"

"A husband!"

"I thought it would grow worse and worse for her. They would never let her hear the end of this dismissal."

"Don't defend yourself, Peter. There's no need, to me."

"But ought I to telephone and get it back? I won't!"

"You wouldn't?"

"No. I'm done with crooked ways."

"Good-bye," said Shaun, with the gentlest irony.

Peter seized his hand. "Shaun! Shaun! I didn't mean that. Please, Shaun!"

"That's all right, Peter. I know what you meant; and I'm glad, provided you don't run straightforwardness to death. You meant that you are an artist now, a business man no longer—and intend to behave with the freedom and frankness natural to the part."

"Not quite that, you know," said Peter, puzzled. Shaun laughed irrepressibly. The hand that Peter had released he placed upon his shoulder, in one of his rare caresses.

"It's better for you to be open, old chap," he said. "It suits your genius. Now you must go and pack and I'll accompany you and take every drawing you've got. There'll be a reply from that wife of yours, perhaps!"

"I say!" cried Peter, springing to his feet.

They drove to Church Street. "Mine!" said Shaun, stepping in front of Peter to pay the driver. Then they tore upstairs, the landlady intercepting them on the landing to say that Albert had not waited for no answer but since then a boy in buttons had come and she had

signed for the letter which there it was on that table. Peter thanked her and ran. Shaun lingered to satisfy his curiosity about the boy in buttons, who proved to be a district messenger. He suspected aphasia, but could extract no more from the landlady than, "My 'usbing always calls 'em that."

"The husband must be a character," he remarked on joining Peter, who with radiant face held out to him a tiny sheet of notepaper. "Want me to read it? All right." He took, and read in Cynthia's big clear handwriting. *Will be there. C.*

"Very much to the point, too!" said Shaun.

III

It was safe to rely on Cynthia's wits, even during an elopement. Accordingly, when Peter was reminded of the size of Waterloo station and recalled the indefiniteness of his direction 'under the clock,' he made his way to the one on the departure platform for main line trains, and was unperturbed when he did not find her there. He was some minutes early, and she might be late, for she would not have begun to pack until Shaun's telegram provided her with an excuse. Shaun had written and begged her to deceive the servants; she might say she was called into the country by the illness of a chum, he would take care that a wire reached her after Sir Everard had left. His plan was to visit the latter at the Colonial Office and break the news himself. Peter, stalking to and fro, mentally re-read the scrawl. . . . *Kindly remember that you have written to tell me of your intention without giving me your new address. I shall plead guilty to having been present at the wedding and shall say that I have long been expecting Peter's dismissal, in view of his having come under the displeasure of L. M. (whom your father has never liked). In any case he would have resigned soon. I can speak as to his future as a journalist.*

You will leave a note for your father and mother, I expect. Dear girl, let it be firm as well as loving. Do not write to them again or let them know your address until I give the word. Nothing would do more harm than a premature meeting or correspondence. In the first place I have to prove to Sir Everard that Peter's dismissal involved no personal disgrace, to do which I may approach Mr. Mulholland and possibly Mr. Brown. I can forestall L. M. who dare do nothing immediate, but I must

not force this point, and to create the right impression in Sir Everard's mind may take a couple of weeks. I shall ask Mulholland to give me authority to say privately to the father of Middleton's financée that Middleton's immediate superior spoke strongly in his favour and does not consider his honour touched by what has occurred, and Brown I should ask to say frankly whether if he were a private employer he would trust and employ Peter Middleton. They won't refuse, I know. Keep this for reference. Peter should have it.

Your parents' real and deep affection for you is my strongest card, Cynthia, and I believe it will prevail, though not immediately. My next strongest is their natural dislike of gossip about their daughter. My greatest hope is that Sir Everard will consent to treat the secret marriage—to the world—indulgently, as a romantic whim. That would be his discreetest attitude. It is the one to which I wish to lead him, for it would involve his giving financial support! Complete friendliness and forgiveness on his part would puzzle and baffle the gossips. Nothing else would, as I trust he will see.

Meanwhile lie low and enjoy your honeymoon, children. You will never have another. Gather your roses!

Give my regards to Mr. and Mrs. Trerice and to the wind on the heath.

So the letter had ended, and Peter recalled Shaun's distress because there was not time to correct its prose. He left his post to get the tickets and returned at the exact quarter, thinking, "Dear old Shaun certainly made the best of things!" Cynthia was not there. Suddenly Peter's heart began to thump in his breast and his coolness entirely deserted him. He was waiting for his wife! It was Cynthia who had not come! His wife! His wife! His wife! Five more minutes passed, bringing him a cold fear lest Sir Everard had stayed at home. Would she arrive or not, supposing her father were ill? Impossible to say. The minute-hand seemed to be moving in quick jerks.

Well, they could not have caught the eleven o'clock

express! Peter had decided upon the slower train at 11.10, because it might be emptier and would not be as likely to contain friends of the Bremners. He did not mind an hour more of travelling if they could get a compartment to themselves. It was five minutes past eleven, and he sent a porter to secure places, keeping the luggage by his side. The battered cabin trunk was already labelled and the bag he would carry in his hand. There was a tall girl in a purple coat over white and a hat with a purple bow and a gleam of white, walking swiftly behind a porter's barrow, approaching . . . now he lost her . . . it must be Cynthia! She emerged into view again nearer; she was looking for him. She smiled with a face of relief. Peter waved and ran to her. They shook hands, and she said, "Can my porter take your luggage, or is it in?" She wished to show the steadiness of her nerves; besides Peter was so distracted, he might have done or left undone anything! Very youthful and grave, they proceeded side by side in pursuit of the first porter, who, having scented a tip of magnitude, had struck a bargain with the guard, who alone has power to succour honeymoon couples. He promptly locked them in, and from that moment until the train started they were kept hotly blushing.

As the coach drew clear of the long platform they glanced timidly at each other; their hands had already met. Cynthia's beautiful eyes did not drop before the ardour of his, and in a moment she was in his arms, glad to rest there, glad to find forgetfulness in the strength of his clasp. "I'm so sorry to have let you in for this!" he was murmuring, and she smiled adorably with closed eyes at the dear, unconscious humour of the words. "Were you dreadfully astonished, my brave, brave Cynthia?"

"Girls aren't so easily startled," she whispered, returning his kisses. "It's sweet to be here, Peter! You are kind to me!"

"I was a brute to ask you to leave your home."

"No, no. A wife should follow her husband. It was better that I should come. I felt you were in trouble

and needed me more than they did. Do you need me, Peter?''

Peter intimated that he did, in a manner that carried conviction. Then he drew back and looked at her. As Cynthia gazed her own eyes filled with tears. There was no need for him to speak. She murmured:

''I hadn't guessed how much you wanted me, poor Peter.''

''I've been lonely,'' he said. ''That's over now, thank God. Darling! I——'' Her parted lips were curved so sweetly, so adorably that they drew his gaze, which travelled over her lifted, rounded chin down her white throat to the lovely base of it left visible by the opening of her blouse. He gave a sigh of happiness, and bent to her.

The train rushed swiftly through the smiling summer country under a deep blue sky. The joyful hours sped with swallow flight by the lovers, darting into the eternity of the past. . . .

IV

THEY lunched in the stuffy, swaying saloon, the observed of all observers, painfully self-conscious in spite of Cynthia's dignified composure and Peter's stiff-shouldered erectness. The girl glanced to left and right, and leaning forward told him: "I put it on in the cab —my ring, Peter. It likes to be on."

A waiter plunged by with dishes of vegetables. Peter said, "It ought to feel jolly honoured at being round your finger, kid! I'm thinking of Shaun—I'm afraid your father will simply bow him out! There's one thing though, Shaun can be enormously reasonable and calm."

"He will slip in some useful things that Dad will not forget. *Has* slipped in!" agreed the daughter. "I wrote the shortest note, Peter! Just telling what I had done, asking them to forgive me, and saying how I loved them. They *can't* doubt that I love them, can they? Can they?"

"I shouldn't think it was humanly possible," said Peter with seriousness. "They've known you all your life, darling!"

"I began to speak about you to Mummy before she went, and she cut me short, and in the evening during dessert when the servants had gone I tried so hard to pluck up courage to speak to Dad. Somehow I couldn't. He was too unconscious! And none of us have ever dared to defy him openly. I was afraid of breaking down, and there was the habit of so many years against me!"

"Look out, that chap across the way is listening."

The waiter whisked plates before them, and the conversation closed.

V

THE only portion of the journey which reminded Peter of the visit to Tintagel two years ago was the arrival at Camelford station and long line of wagonettes outside. The sun was shining as before, the fresh Cornish air was blowing in gusts of fragrance, but there were no figures waiting at the exit. He had looked for them in a sudden rush of recollection; the stern-faced man in grey and Joyce the cool study in browns from flowing hair to slim legs—he had looked, almost expecting to see!

They drove inland in a silence which was partly the result of fatigue, in part of a new shyness that had come upon them; but when they reached the long, sloping street of Camelford questions began to flow, and the driver leaned back to answer them.

" 'Tes the 'King's Arms,' the hotel on the right—that's a very good house, sir. You'd be comfortable there! The building in the market-place is the Guild'all; see the golden Camel up over on the vane. Now we cross the river Camel over this bridge——"

"Why, it's a brook!" exclaimed Cynthia.

"Of course 'tes, miss, but we call it a river. 'Tes filled with trout, and salmon peal in the season. We don't reckon to poach no trout, but the salmon we helps ourselves to. 'Tes the finest trout-stream in all Cornwall, the visitors say."

"How far is Roughtor * from here?" Peter asked.

"Four mile and more. I can't take you beyond Roughtor Bridge, sir; that's the beginning of the moor. I expect Trerice will meet you with his cart for the luggage. He's a hind, not a farmer—you spoke of Radgells Farm when you gave the direction; 'tes not a

* Pronounced Routor, ou as in 'out.'

farm by rights, and by rights he's got no license to carry luggage or passengers in his cart, but I wouldn't say nothing against him. He knows me and told me to look out for you, sir. Radgells es between Roughtor and Brown Willy. There's a London gentleman stays there. For years he's been comin'."

"He's a friend of ours."

"Is that so, sir? Well, now! Trerice is a stranger too, for the matter of that. He comes from down Bodmin way, and he hasn't been on the moor more'n ten years. Here's a pretty bit, sir. Tregoodwell, they call this."

It was a beautiful little village at cross-roads; beyond it was a turn and sharp descent into a valley through which flowed another stream, a shaded brook with high ferny banks. They crossed and walked up the ascent beyond, passing a cottage with its fowl-run completely surrounded and covered in by thick wire netting.

"They hawks is a terrible nuisance hereabouts, and the foxes too," said the driver.

"What are those gates on the right, like park gates?" asked Cynthia. "Is there a park there?"

"Never has been as I know of, miss. They call the farm Parkwalls. Now you'd better get in, and thank you for walking. 'Tes a terrible rough road for sure."

They were on the hill, at the beginning of a bare rolling country of the nature of reclaimed moorland. Behind, in the distance, was Camelford dropping into its valley in the evening shadows. The air was clear, the scene both wild and peaceful. Now the carriage clattered down a stony slope and crossed a stream with grassy banks, and stickles, and pools of clear, dark water, and again they dismounted and walked up a steep rise.

"Can we see the moor and Roughtor from up above?" asked Cynthia eagerly of the driver.

"Yes, miss," he said. "Those crags you've been catching sight of all along over the hills, they belong to be on Roughtor, and we're close to the edge of the moor now."

"Come on," she cried to Peter, and off they ran ahead up the road. Panting, they arrived on the brow of the

hill and stood before a long declivity leading to a stream crossed by a small, open bridge, round which splendid cattle were watering and moorland ponies were lingering with their foals. On the other side began the moor and rose to a ridge, dusky and craggy a mile away against the evening sky, with three summits; Showery Tor on the left which could be approached by a gradual slope; the steeper Little Roughtor with strangely-balanced rocks; and the great granite-piled Roughtor, bold as a fortress, forming the end of the crest, which here dropped precipitously to the moor. The flanks of Roughtor were strewn with rocks. It lay bare but not bleak, dominating the smaller, grass-topped hills and downs that swept away into the distance on either hand, and the last sunlight caressed its heaped-up summit, gilding it like the crown on the head of a lion couchant which brooded immemorially over the open moor.

"Oh, Roughtor, I love you!" called out Cynthia.

The wind drifted against their cheeks with a soft chilliness that told of coming night. The mysterious shadows lengthened. A lapwing cried plaintively, to lure them from the neighbourhood of its nest. From far away came the beautiful whistling note of a curlew. Now the strange loveliness of the moor altered swiftly as they watched; and a gleam of pink, a reflection from the western sky, appeared above the ridge, spreading upon a feathery cloud which was trailing from Showery Tor. Something moving drew down their gaze, and there between Roughtor and the next rounded hill they saw a speck that was a horse and cart. It approached, becoming distinct, and the driver spoke to them from behind:

"Better get in, sir. I see Trerice yonder."

"Thank you for letting us wait," said Cynthia. She had no idea how long they had stood there gazing.

" 'Tes worth looking at, miss. I often come out of a Sunday to sit here and smoke my pipe."

"Are they Hut Circles,—those circles of stone just visible there on the moor?" asked Peter, as they clattered down the hill.

"That's what they call 'em, sir, and when you've seen

one of the wish * things you've seen the lot; that's my opinion. They'm old as the hills and 'tain't more than guessing when a man says what was the use of them. See that monument down under—by the bridge, miss,—that monument is more interesting-like. A murdered woman is buried there."

Cynthia uttered an exclamation, and the driver touched his hat. "Beg pardon, miss, and you new-married, too! 'Twas thoughtless of me to talk of murders. But you see I remember the old people speakin' of it and that makes a difference. It seems brave an' sad to me, that monument does. Beg pardon, sir. I ought to 'a remembered gentlefolks don't care to hear of murders. I've bached for myself † all these years, and I haven't any sense. Here we are at Roughtor Bridge. I can't go no further. We must wait till Trerice comes up."

"The foals are so pretty," said Cynthia. "Look, Peter!"

Soon the little cart drove up and Mr. Trerice descended. He was a small, dark man with a ragged black moustache and the kindly, mild and reserved expression that is characteristically Cornish. "Pleased to meet you, sir, pleased to meet you, ma'am," he said gently, looking up with very bright blue eyes which were secret and somewhat timid until he smiled and then became suddenly frank and clear. "Any friends of Mr. James are welcome." The transfer of luggage was soon accomplished, after which their host looked confused. "Ef you don't mind following the cart for a couple of miles, sir, the lady could drive, and I'll walk with the horse——"

"Let me walk, Peter," said Cynthia. "Mr. Trerice, please go on and we'll keep you in sight. We can't lose our way then."

"Thank you, ma'am," said Trerice, looking relieved. " 'Tes jolty in this cart, and the moor's wonderful dry underfoot. 'Tes scarcely soft anywhere now. We go under Roughtor, between that and Louden Hill and bear

* Weird, strange.

† Kept house by myself, been a bachelor.

to the left then, for Brown Willy lies at the back of Roughtor, and Radgells es between the two. 'Tes only a step."

"It's a matter of two mile!" commented the driver, who had turned the carriage and was waiting interestedly to see them start.

"That's only a step!" cried Cynthia.

"Bravo, miss, and a happy life to 'ee! Good night, sir!"

Both vehicles started, and the last link with London seemed broken. Henceforward they moved as new people in a magic land of purity and distances, where was pale sunlight and long purple shadows drifting and springy turf underfoot and a scented wind musical in their ears; where the strength of their youth was doubled and they felt as though they could walk for ever in a rapture of exhilaration and happy relief. They looked at each other and smiled. They laughed aloud, with clasped hands swinging, and were suddenly silent, conscious of the warmth of palm in palm. Their hands clung like friends, their hands clung like lovers. Great Roughtor shook his granite mane against the sky. He blessed them, saying, "Mine is the glory of the ages that are past; in the beating of your pulses, O mortals, is the promise of aeons yet to come! I, who am immortal Death, salute Life. Ye shall love me, and I will make you wise. For Love that fears not is free as Death, and we are equals, ye and I!"

As they came close beneath his grandeur they trembled and their hands fell apart. "He's like a sphinx," said Cynthia, her sweet voice hushed, "but still he's friendly. We're going to be so happy on the moor, Peter!"

Then Trerice looked back, pointing to a short cut, and presently the roof of Radgells appeared below them; beyond, began the slopes of Brown Willy. It was shadowy here among the hills, but behind them in the sky glowed red above Louden, and the craggy precipitous head of Roughtor was dark against red sky. Above Brown Willy's cairn sparkled a single star. The moor was quiet.

A stony track led downward to the open door of the

house, from which came a beam of light. They saw an outside staircase leading to a loft, a porch rose-covered, a big window beside it at which a woman's figure appeared carrying a lamp; she put it down and looked out as Trerice staggered round the side of the building, bent beneath one of Cynthia's trunks.

"Hallo, Mother," he called. "They'm coming!" The woman vanished from the window and met Trerice entering. He had not perceived Peter and Cynthia, but Mrs. Trerice did. "Get on in with 'ee, Will!" she said, making way. He stumbled forward and disappeared. Mrs. Trerice slipped back and greeted the travellers upon the threshold with a shy, "Good evening"; she seemed astonished by Cynthia's beauty. Then she led them in. She was a very broad-shouldered woman with a thin face and large, dark eyes, and brown hair combed back. Her expression was intelligent and kind; intensely self-reliant without the smallest trace of conceit.

She wished to take them through the kitchen into the parlour while the luggage was being carried upstairs, but Peter insisted on helping Mr. Trerice, and Cynthia begged to be allowed to stay where she was. "If you don't mind!" said Mrs. Trerice, visibly pleased. Cynthia addressed a little girl of nine or ten who was playing by the hearth. She was awed by the clothes of the London lady and would not answer. "She doesn't see many strangers out here on the moor," her mother apologised for her. "Speak up, Gwenneth! Tell the lady the kittens' names. We call them 'Blue' and 'Smoke,' miss. Mr. James gave us the mother-cat. He brought her all the way from London. It's odd . . . Gwenneth will chatter away to Mr. James." "She will to me in a day or two," promised Cynthia.

Mrs. Trerice, busy at the stove, had still found time for many an anxious glance at Cynthia's attire, the simplicity of which did not by any means conceal its expensiveness, and now she said: "I do hope you'll be comfortable here. I'm afraid you'll find it very rough after what you've been used to, miss." Cynthia noted the pretty singsong lilt of her voice.

"I'm sure I shall be comfortable!" she said quickly, and indeed the clean lime-washed walls and stone floor, the grandfather clock, the scrubbed table and painted round-backed wooden chairs, the pots simmering pleasantly on the stove, the winding staircase up which Peter had just vanished with a brown leather bag, the geraniums in the window and the great silence outside gave the cheerful interior an air of peace and home. Her impulsiveness lent her the last charm necessary to captivate the Cornishwoman, already predisposed to like the friend of 'Mr. James.' "I wish you happiness," she said with her face turned away as she stood at the fire. "And I ought not to be calling you 'miss.' We'll do our best for you here."

"Thank you," said Cynthia.

"You'm walcome!" And the two women were friends.

The moment of going up to wash hands was embarrassing to Cynthia, for the small interval of settling-down in the kitchen had made Peter seem suddenly far away. She felt shy as she went up the winding, narrow staircase. Also she hated the idea of appearing at a disadvantage. Sponging one's face was such a prosaic thing after being admitted to the friendship of Roughtor, the Spirit of the Moor. Oh, there were many reasons! She would not admit that she was in the least afraid of entering their common room; but should it not be a place apart and holy? She longed petulantly for a private suite and her own maid, then naming herself a cowardly fool moved into their bedroom with dragging footsteps. He had called to her from within, whence came the sound of pouring water. With just a glance at her drooping flower countenance, her lowered eyes, he moved past her and went out. The instant he was gone she became ashamed and called, "Peter," impulsively. He heard and returned. Then she held out her arms.

In the parlour they found cream and many cakes, home-made bread, both white and saffron, ham and eggs, and tea; and ate hungrily. Her hair looked fairer than usual in the lamplight. Her bare throat

was very white. He remembered how he had kissed it in the train. Her eyes were still shy and wild. She was a lovely girl; anyone would have said she was a lovely girl, but to him she was precious above words, above thoughts. He kissed her finger with the ring on it, slipping instinctively to his knees by her chair and then as she uttered a sweet, little startled cry he buried his face upon her knees, sobbed out that he was unworthy and would make her unhappy, he was so selfish. He would try not to be a beast to her, try to be kind, she had given up so much, he did not deserve her, did not know why she loved him. "Oh, Peter," she said, stroking his hair gently, "I can't think why *you* love *me!*" She comforted him, and all at once they were merry. When the meal was over they started to clear away, but Mrs. Trerice came in and would not let them touch a thing. She brought them 'Blue' and 'Smoke' to play with and told them how their sheets were bleached in the brightest sunshine and how Mr. James had given her most of the furniture of this room,—he did his kindnesses in such a way you couldn't say no.

Then she left them and Cynthia went upstairs to unpack. Peter had already thrown out the things he needed; which was a pity, he felt now, for he would have liked to work side by side with her. He would have boldly followed her, but somehow he could not stir. His feet seemed weighted with lead. He was overwhelmed by the most complete shyness. She was like a mystery, a spirit moving overhead. The plancheon—the plank ceiling—communicated her presence as she stirred, light-foot. The soft noises and whispering sounds frightened him. She was no longer merely beautiful in his thoughts, she was All-Beauty, no longer a girl, but the Secret of Maidenhood, no longer a woman, but the Soul of Womanliness, she was God's messenger to him—and a human, passionate lover like himself. He murmured her name, "Cynthia!" It was as though she had suddenly outgrown it, she was too great and wondrous to be named any more.

And then she came down and sat opposite him with a

book, and there was a silence between them, and they peeped at one another with hot cheeks while it seemed to each that the other's eyes shone and were very brilliant and that his own eyes on the contrary were dim. They were tingling with excitement. After a while she rose to her feet with a dignity which concealed her nervous trembling, and he rose too and lighted the candle that Mrs. Trerice had put ready, and gave it her. She took it in her left hand and held out her right in a frank gesture. Gravely they clasped hands and met each other's gaze. It was a sacrament of friendship—which altered after a second to the challenge of youth, of sex. Their eyes dropped, their hands dropped, and she turned away, saying strangely, "I do love you, Peter, after all," and moved to the door, a young, girlish figure, and went out. Through the open door he could see the flame flickering with the trembling of her hand, and her voice said, "Good night," steadily to the inmates of the kitchen who chorussed a reply, and then she passed up the stairs and out of sight.

The beating of Peter's heart would not let him listen for the ceasing of the dim sounds overhead. The Trerices went up. A night-wind murmured about the windows. He had an odd fancy that he heard Roughtor stir outside, rising to his feet in order to pace the moor, a watchful friendly presence, the Past guarding the Future. The thought of the future caused Peter to shake from head to foot. He prayed in an agony of humility, "Make me worthy, O God!" In a fever of happiness he thanked God for giving him Cynthia.

Yes, there was silence above. With a steady hand and breath he extinguished the lamp. He felt his way out of the room, Youth singing in his heart. Swiftly he ascended the stairs. He saw light through the keyhole, like a faint melodious whisper of his name, bidding him enter. For a moment he stood still, awed on the threshold of the new life, then clutched at the handle of the door with eager fingers, knowing that he loved her, that she was near. . . .

The door opened; and closed behind him.

VI

THEIR window, wide open, looked upon the east, but the early sunshine did not awaken them, nor did the fresh wind of the morning, stirring the coverlet and the soft strands of Cynthia's tumbled hair. They slept like two children, his head nursed against her white breast, his arm flung about her; each clasped his treasure, smiling peacefully. The clatter of milk-buckets aroused them and drew them to the window. "Let's only be happy to-day!" said Cynthia. "There's nowhere but here and no one but us in the whole, wide world." She put up her lips innocently to be kissed, as they leaned out, elbows on the sill, and nestled into his embrace with a little sigh of happiness. "I love you, dear Peter," she said. Mrs. Trerice appeared below and they slipped back into the shadow of the room. Out of his arms she flew to the washstand and poured out water. "Let's get up quickly and be fearfully athletic!" she cried. "Please, Peter, set up the screen for me. I feel as though I could run twice round the world!"

"We're too late to see the sunrise from Brown Willy," said Peter.

"Another morning we will. Who'll be first on the topmost top of Roughtor? I, Cynthia, will be. We'll climb the steepest face."

"The end of the ridge is a precipice, darling. We can't manage that."

"I could with ropes. I'm a mountaineer—(splash),—a horrid boastful pig of a mountaineer—(loud splashing). But we'll go up the Camelford side. That's steeper and jollier than this side, isn't it?"

"Yes. This is bare and stony and the other is grown with furze and bushes, with big blocks of granite tumbled about. Right as usual, Cyn."

"Don't call me Cyn, call me Star, Peter. No, you mustn't look round yet. I like to be called Star because it makes me feel vain."

"You'd better not talk if you want me not to look round," said Peter reprovingly. Cynthia laughed.

When they came down for breakfast Mrs. Trerice addressed them as "My dear souls" in her surprisé. "Mr. James was never afoot so early as this," she said. She could not take her eyes off Cynthia; there was a tenderness, a touching softness and radiance about the girl's beauty and grace which melted the heart. So while the kettle was boiling she led them into the flower garden at the back of the house, where fuchsias and wallflowers bloomed, and rose bushes scrambled about the walls, laden with great pink blossoms; and she discoursed as freely as she would have to her favourite, Mr. James. When she had come here fourteen years ago this garden was all choked with nettles, which she and her husband had killed by pouring on them pailfuls of boiling water. Turrible thick they were. And the adders used to come into the parlour through a hole in the wall, and get into the kitchen at night and steal food. They had killed twelve or fifteen adders while they were cleansing the house, and once she had met one wriggling downstairs. "In another moment he was dead as a dish!" She had not seen an adder for a month or two now, but there were plenty up over in the clitter below Brown Willy, adders and foxes and badgers—and towncrows too, turrible nuisance among the fowls, my dear—turrible!

"What's a clitter, please, Mrs. Trerice?" asked Cynthia. "Is it that long, sloping down, brackeny bit?"

"Yes, all that bracken grows over piled-up rocks, and there are deep holes there. That's a clitter; and that's where the foxes and adders live. The hunt's a pretty sight streamin' over Brown Willy. I like to come out and watch 'em, but they don't pay more'n a shillun a head for the fowls the foxes kill, and 'tesn't enough. We lose heavy by the foxes and towncrows."

"Are they what we should call carrion-crows?" asked Peter.

"I don't know, sir. I suppose they are. We call 'em towncrows because they're such thieves. Now I'll set your breakfast ready and put out the pasties and cakes for you to take for your lunch, ef you're sure you won't come back to the house. 'Tesn't no trouble to me, either way."

"Are you afraid of snakes, dear?" asked Peter, confidentially, as he and Cynthia strolled after Mrs. Trerice.

"Not a bit. But I *am* afraid of mice."

He called, "Are there any mice here, Mrs. Trerice?"

She stopped in surprise. "Oh no, sir. The adders see to that."

"Well, one of us is happy," remarked Peter. "I *am* afraid of snakes. My wife—(how splendid it sounded!)—hates mice. What are you afraid of?"

Mrs. Trerice considered. " 'Tes a lonely place this, a bra' lonely spot, and I tell 'ee what I'm afraid of. I'm mortal afraid of scalding myself, for what I'd do then I can't tell!" She hurried on into the kitchen.

At the end of breakfast Peter said that if their landlady had provided enough for six, anyhow they had eaten enough for four. "You aren't very shocked at me for being greedy?" inquired Cynthia. "Are you?" He reassured her, and she withdrew to make herself ready for going out. Cynthia was conscious of an extraordinary sense of freedom since yesterday, a new breadth of happiness, a feeling of naturalness. She did not appear to herself to have changed suddenly from a girl into a woman. She felt herself if possible more girlish than ever, but a natural person instead of a conventionally civilised one. Her love was right; it had completed her. She came back singing with a careless joy, head bare, all in white down to stockings and shoes, the sleeves of her blouse rolled up to her shoulders, a walking-stick in her hand, a bunch of wallflowers at her breast. She was a gay, athletic figure of Spring, as unlike the conventional Rosemary of the drawing-room as could be imagined.

"I say!" exclaimed Peter. "You darling!"

"What's the matter?" asked Cynthia guilelessly—but she blushed.

"You! You're just perfect for the moor. It's so jolly to see your arms. They're as good as any statue's—Shaun says so, too."

"I don't care what Shaun says!" said Cynthia, heartlessly. "Thank you for liking them, Peter. I want to get them sun-browned."

"Sun-browned!"

"Yes. They are too white." Peter would have approved if she had wanted to have them black. He did not understand, but he said cheerfully yes. His young wife should have her wish.

Then they went side by side through the rose-covered porch, their elbows touching with the blissfullest thrill of contact, and fell apart when they saw Mr. Trerice approaching on a pony. He had led the beast with Gwenneth on its back as far as the edge of the moor, and now was riding home. They learnt that the little girl had five miles to go to attend school at St. Breward's, and the same distance to return by herself every evening; if she got wet on the way out schoolmaster would send her home to once, but of course she did not go in the roughest weather. "There's no fear of rain to-day. They big, white clouds mean nothing and the kingcrowners are abroad."

When Trerice had passed on, Peter asked, "What are kingcrowners?"

"Red Admiral or Peacock butterflies."

"Why, I thought they were probably eagles!"

She laughed at him very sweetly, and after that they walked for a while hand in hand. Close to the house they passed a stone circle, a ring of upright slabs a couple of feet in height marking the position of *something,* but he would be a bold man who was certain *what.* Thus, Peter; and then they proceeded along the way they had come last night, in order to pass under Roughtor and attack him from the wilder Camelford side. Wheatears and meadow-pipits scolded them daintily forward, pursuing them from nest to nest.

Now they were beneath the precipitous head of the lion of the moor, at the edge of the clitter of stones and bracken which outstretching formed his paws. They skirted the clitter and rounded the head to where grass and heather gave access to a stiff slope, strown with granite blocks amongst which grew whortle bushes and clumps of bracken, leading up to the summit where the granite outcrop was bare and exposed and enormous rocks were piled one upon the other smooth and dusky and weatherworn, their lower masses overgrown with lichen, the upper surfaces wind-swept and naked. The top of Roughtor looked some five hundred feet above the level of the moor where they stood, and to race up it called for young breath and young, strong limbs.

Peter and Cynthia were discussing where the race should end. "I don't know that we can climb that sort of cairn upon the very top," said Peter, fearing for Cynthia. "Let's make it that the first who sees over to the other side wins."

Cynthia, confident of her climbing, was afraid for Peter. "The first to see Brown Willy," she agreed. "Don't drop off your knapsack, Boy!"

"There, you are stooping like a sprinter!" said Peter. "We're not off yet. You must have a start, Girl. Go on ahead twenty yards."

"I'm sure I've gone more than twenty yards," cried Cynthia indignantly, turning round. "Why didn't you stop me, Peter?"

"I was watching you, darling. You are so sweet, Cynthia! Now ready. Off!"

Cynthia found herself running. She did not remember starting, but she was running as she had never run before. Now came the rise—she had barely time to choose her course, but pressed on up as best she could, round rocks, over more rocks, now scrambling on hands and knees, now creeping sideways, now swinging herself up by the help of bushes, going as straight as she could. "I've never been so happy," she thought, rushing a steep patch of moss and turf over which a less agile young animal would have had to crawl. A great ram blundered to his

feet, startling her, and crashed away through bracken. The girl with a little cry raced on. Her mind cleared, and a recollection flew across its surface like sunshine over water. How often she had wondered whether she could abandon her individuality and just be Peter's—which was precisely what was giving her happiness now! She loved him! She loved him! Flying forward with beating heart to the crest of the rise, glorying in her youthful strength and deep-lunged fleetness, she could still rejoice to hear his footsteps close . . . at her side . . . to see him win by only a yard. And she had breath enough left to cry out, flinging herself down, "Oh, the valley and Brown Willy! Look at the little stream in the valley, running below Radgells! I'm glad you won, Peter."

Peter once started on an idea was not to be diverted. "Up on that pile of rocks is the topmost top," he said. "I wonder how many tons each of them weighs! I wonder whether it's wind or water that wears them so smooth. They're granite, you know, Starry One. Fifteen feet, twenty feet to go and six footholds. I'll go first. Mind, you must not come unless I find it easy."

The slabs thinned away to narrow edges affording a foothold, but rose steeply one above the other. Peter blundered and slid down. The other faces were abrupt, unapproachable; only this side turned towards Brown Willy was possible of conquest.

Cynthia had been watching from the ground. She stooped and drew off shoes and stockings. Her skirts were short and gave her free action of the limbs. "Let me try," she said. "You need rubber shoes, Peter. Your boots are too slippery."

"You've got rubbers, haven't you, kid?" said Peter, without looking round: still dogged.

"Mine are my old lacrosse shoes, with studs," explained Cynthia. 'They are no good. Do let me try, Peter."

"Oh, I say! That's the notion, of course."

He made way for her, and the girl went up lithely, bare arms reaching overhead, supple body balanced, and her feet easily maintaining their hold on the smooth

stone. Up she went! Now she had a hand on the top-most slab of granite, now her head rose above it, shoulders followed; she bent over it and, lifting herself with her arms, raised a knee and got it over the edge; then brought up a bare foot, and was stooping on one knee upon the brink. He saw her suddenly rise lightly and stand.

"Hurry up," she called. "The stone is warm and pleasant to one's toes climbing, and it's more than warm on top, I can tell you! Too hot to keep still. I'm going to dance!" Gracefully she sketched a few steps; then, as Peter joined her, pointed down to round, symmetrical hollows in the granite on which they stood. "Don't fall in!" she said. "They call these sacrificial basins, and talk of druids, but don't you think they are rather obviously water-worn! This big one has got a channel running from its edge. I'm sure they are. Oh!" Two great birds mounted majestically from below, passing close, and then, sweeping away from the humans, sailed in great curves higher and higher until they became mere specks against the blue sky.

"Buzzards!" she told him.

"I recognise their flight," said Peter. "I must have seen some before. They're like aeroplanes."

"Isn't it a view? Just look at it!"

Below them was the slope they had ascended, and the moor, and Roughtor Bridge, and the hill they had driven down as they came from Camelford, and ridge after ridge of green, stretching away to the horizon beyond which were hidden the dark cliffs of Tintagel and Boscastle. The houses of Delabole and its queer, short-spired church were outlined against the sky in the distance. The roofs of Camelford were visible, trooping into the valley of the Camel. With interlocked arms the two pressed close to each other and gazed in speechless happiness. On their right was the emerald-hued turf of the summit of the ridge and the cairn of Little Roughtor, almost as lofty as that on which they stood; and, showing perceptible traces of artificial work, the ruins of an ancient hill-fortress. On their left, far

below, stretched a wide moor, with clay-workings on its distant edge, shining white in the sunlight. Garrow and Butters Tor rose from this moorland, the former with a solitary pine-tree on its side. Out beyond stretched hill after hill, past Hawk's Tor; and, yet farther, more green and rounded hills; and, farther still, a well-wooded country and the obelisk called Bodmin Monument, with fainter and bluer hills melting into the turquoise sky. As they turned Brown Willy towered before them; and between the two mountains ran a slender stream which issued from a marsh and flowed down past Radgells, after which it bent away towards the heart of the moor and was lost from sight beyond two pools, where it curved behind Brown Willy.

Their backs were now towards Camelford and the sea; they were facing south-west. Cynthia's pretty toes were over the edge of the wall up which they had climbed. She seemed to hover, as though she might leap down twenty feet to the earth below.

Peter noticed the toes. "Do all girls have pink, shining nails, and dainty feet and slender ankles like yours?" he asked. "I'm sure they can't have."

"Mine are supposed to be rather nice," Cynthia admitted. "If you like them I might become conceited; so help me down, Peter, and don't make me a complacent wife."

They clambered down and stretched themselves happily in the sun. Cynthia remembered that she loved having the soles of her feet tickled,—a recollection from a time of sleeping with Joyce,—and demanded the luxury. Peter took the beautiful things into his lap, and presently the girl's long lids drooped and rose, she smiled an exquisite, drowsy smile, which said, "I love you." The stars of her eyes were veiled, and she slept.

He watched by her fragrant young body, scented with heather scents by sun and air. The sunshine beat upon them, the fresh, sparkling air blew over them, the blue sky arched overhead. Youth and love existed. London had never been. Shaun was a small, distant figure in the memory—the friend who was scheming to help, who

was following at that moment a uniformed messenger into Sir Everard's office for the second consultation,—even this friend was dreamlike. "But we do love him," Peter thought, and in her sleep Cynthia smiled. "She's loving him, too," he hoped, gazing deeply. Her flushed cheek was pillowed on the white beauty of an outstretched arm. Curls were straying upon her neck. The sun glinted on her chestnut hair whose masses gained in splendour by their slight disorder. The sleeve of her other arm had become unrolled to within a few inches of her elbow. She raised this hand in a beckoning gesture, again with that mysterious smile, and he trembled with awe, then stooping caught the whisper of his name, and kissed her wrist. She woke with such happy eyes!

When the sun had passed overhead, when they had eaten and again were hungry, they made their way down Roughtor to the cold and amber stream with rocks, black-lichened, in deep pools, and peat-stained rocks; where the dragonfly shot over the surface of the water and a vole lifted his sleek head, only to dive at Cynthia's cry of joy. And they played with the stream. A dipper darted. They followed the flash of his wings.

It led them back to Radgells and the delights of tea. And so the too short day wore swiftly to a close. Again they climbed high Roughtor to watch the afterglow, and saw ragged and heavy low-piled clouds over the line of the horizon, like hills or distant islands seen across fairy seas, and above them a clear orange sky, flecked by charcoal-shadowed smudges that turned to roseate as the orange faded. All the sky grew rose, delicate tinted and ethereal, and slowly paled.

VII

His lips were upon her hair, her cheek warm on his shoulder, and she murmured in a very little voice, "I would like to write again to Mummy, but Shaun said not. I suppose I mustn't, and I will be good, but oh I do hope she'll love me again soon."

He clasped her: "Cynthia, Cynthia!"

"You are first, Peter. Always. My darling!"

"Wife!"

"Husband!"

VIII

Because Cynthia was a conventional girl she intended to take with her to Dozmary Pool a copy of *The Passing of Arthur*, but Shaun would have been horrified at what she did,—she tore out the pages from the bound volume. She would not have dreamt of doing this in the days of Shaun!

Dozmary lay beyond Bolventor village, which is the centre of the moor and the only village thereon, about six miles from Radgells. The direct path to it led across the stream, between Brown Willy and Butters Tor, past the disused tin-streaming sheds and pump and the two pools that lay desolately at the foot of Brown-willy Downs, and vanished out of sight past a moor-man's cottage. Mrs. Trerice pointed out the track. Yes, she walked there once a year for the chapel outing, and went on the lake in a boat; twopence each for adults and children free. No, she did not feel tired after the twelve mile walk. She wasn't young any longer, but she was still brave and brisk. Peter and Cynthia decided to climb Brown Willy and then go on to the Pool. Fifteen miles, including a mountain, should be nothing to youth, if 'no longer young'' could manage twelve and a jollification.

''Not that Brown Willy is a *very* lofty mountain!'' commented Cynthia, ''at least compared with Switzerland, or even Wales! Is it higher than Roughtor? Dear Brown Willy, I don't want to disparage you!''

''It's the best Cornwall can do,'' said Peter, labouring over a guidebook. ''And I say! Those piles of rock, you know,—the one we climbed on Roughtor yesterday, —piles of rock like that are called 'radgells' when they aren't 'tors.' A cairn is an artificial heap, usually over

the grave of a warrior, but the one on the summit of Brown Willy was placed there by the Ordnance Survey. I wonder what on earth for! There are barrows and hut circles and stone circles and fogous all over the place. It's what they call a 'wish' kind of a place, this moor!"

"I think they're friendly, though," said Cynthia. "Everything is, here."

"I daresay they don't like people who poke about and make theories," Peter suggested. "Come along, the sun's out now." They crossed the stream and went first to examine the long bricks of peats set out to dry. Trerice was busy with the peat-spade, slicing away at the edge of a round black pit some two or three feet deep, into which the clods fell down. The next process would be to lift them out and strew them on the drying-ground, and finally after many days they would be piled carefully in stacks to form the winter's fuel. As hind he possessed the right of turbary and he was working now for his own hand.

"Did you notice his eyes?" said Peter, as the two strode away uphill. "They're not exactly dreamy, but he always looks as though he were seeing something a long way off."

"I suppose it comes from doing just that very thing. Mountaineers and moormen have the same sort of look, I think."

"Yes, and sailors!"

"They're windy, rolling people. The others step smoothly. I'm *not* clever, Peter! Shaun pointed it out to me."

Their rush to the summit of Brown Willy substantiated his claim to be a mountain! They found he possessed the gifts of deceptive distances and of false peaks, characteristic of all mountains, and that there was stiff climbing to be done. They went straight and side by side, helping each other as comrades. What a splendid comrade this girl made, thought breathless Peter; while Cynthia, exulting in her agility and activity, was yet generously glad when he outstripped her and felt delicious thrills of joy at being assisted by him.

She loved the grip of his hand and the straining pull at her arm up a steep place. Accustomed as she was from childhood to have her looks admired, and conscious as she was of their distinction, she could not repress a happy triumph at the involuntary glance he always cast at the beauty of the bare, flexing arm. The unconsciousness of the tribute increased its value, which she appraised with joy and a certain childish vanity new to her own knowledge of herself. But it was sweet to be admired by Peter, to sway him and then to tremble into submission! She longed that he should give her a sharp word, a command, or even a blow. Bracing herself, defiant at the thought, she withheld the hand that he reached for, her pride awakened and eager for conflict; then collapsed at his first glance of surprise, beguiled by the sweetness of surrender. He snatched her wrist almost with roughness and drew her to him, clasping her waist; then swung her up in his strong arms and carried her bodily up the last few steps to the summit of Brown Willy. He set her gently down beside the cairn, and stood with downcast look, a trifle ashamed of his violence.

"I don't know why I did that!" he said. "I hope I didn't hurt you, Star!"

Cynthia looked away. "I should have liked to be hurt by you," she said with abandonment. She innocently nestled to him; then shrank away, suddenly shy. As always, he respected her mood, and let her go.

They climbed the cairn and sat side by side, a puzzle to each other and to themselves. They were not yet completely in accord, were still somewhat wild and strange in their new relationship. The comrades were also lovers, and the lovers had not learnt to be comrades. Shaun would have found this stage in their development intensely interesting, for he held that the happiest marriages are those in which a community of frankness is established during the first few days of the honeymoon. He had foreseen the danger of this couple falling short of perfect happiness. Peter was a reserved boy, Cynthia had a Rosemary side to her character which might lead

to a shrinking back after a first impulsive surrender: when Peter's reserve and his sympathy combined might well set up a small, unsurmountable barrier between them. Such a barrier sometimes grows with the months and grows with the years until from being scarcely perceptible it blots out the sun and separates the courses of two lives.

But as they perched there, with dangling feet, high above the green world of plains and hills rolling away to a craggy horizon, the beauty of the scene caused them to forget their own selves, their difficulties and troubles; and their minds cleared as the downs to sunshine behind the chasing shadows. They pointed out to each other the blackness of Kilmaur, a wild hill across the moor, and were trying to guess where the Cheesewring stood upon the horizon-range, when Peter caught a glint of light beyond the only wood visible in that wide sweep of country, and hailed it as distant Dozmary. They scarcely turned to look at Roughtor; the future, the unexplored held all their interest. Somewhere below, at the foot of lofty Brown Willy, was Fowey Well, the source of the Fowey River, whose banks they could see twisting across the moor. The water ran too low between to be discernible, and the banks at this distance had the appearance of stone hedges, so that the river vanished in the guise of a lane behind Codda Tor.

Suddenly Cynthia stretched out a lovely arm, sunkissed, bare to the shoulder, and pointed leftward to a haze in the middle sky. "Look!" she cried. Dark land was piercing the far-off greyness like an island rising from the midst of a sea, and as the mist cleared away a plateau was revealed, descending, dropping from the sky to touch the horizon. That which had seemed poised in the air was now a tableland, higher than Brown Willy, serrated dimly with faint peaks, and swiftly it vanished as it had come. Now he was caught by the gaze of her wondering eyes, wide-lidded, and she breathed "Dartmoor!" with a soft amazement. He was lost in the mystery of her eyes. Laughing, she started forward, rising with outflung arms and springing from the side of

the cairn to the ground, on which she swayed upright with easy grace. "Come, Peter!" cried the sweet, soprano voice as he stared. She beckoned him with voice and finger pointing in a lovely, theatrical gesture along the ridge. "I thought I was in fairyland!" she cried. "But, oh, it's jolly to be a girl alive!" Astonished at her changes, Peter jumped down and followed. He had a vague idea that he was learning to know woman.

Her white-clad figure ran on ahead. She was wearing a blue scarf to-day in place of a belt, and he caught her by it and it came undone. Then he bound her wrists and led her captive to where his knapsack had been thrown off; and they played hide-and-seek on the rocky ridge, making themselves as hungry as hunters, and sat down and ate a solemn sandwich each. Whortleberry bushes grew round about, Cornish heath not yet in flower was below them as they lay—a springy carpet; stonecrop starred the chinks of granite. Sunshine and shadow swept across the moor. Great white clouds sailed stately over the sky, and the wind made whispered promises, lisping in broken gusts of secrets to be revealed; while the heat of the sun was scorching. They removed into shadow and sat cross-legged, packing the parcel as slowly as they could.

"I wish the wind would tell, instead of dying away," chattered the girl. "You are exasperating, wind! Peter, the string, please! Thank you, dear. Have you noticed how different Brown Willy is from Roughtor—no great boulders strewn, just a projecting edge of granite like a wall, as far as the clitter they call Brownwilly Downs?"

"Yes, and the rock is in thinner slices."

"Slices, Best One?"

"I don't mean strata. Don't you see it's worn horizontally in parallel lines?"

"Of course it is, impossibly attractive Peter! I like you, Peter. You are nice. Now we ought to get on or we shall *never* reach Dozmary!"

But the recesses where rushes grew; the wet patches; the tracts of deep moss; the shady angles and caverns

inviting rest; the sunshiny rock faces challenging to a climb; the bracken at the edge of the clitter, where they found the skeleton of a ram picked clean by the buzzards and towncrows, its ribs gnawed short by the foxes, then at some distance away his curved horns, which they took as a memento; the fascination of the cloud-shadows, coursing over the billowing plain below; the beguilements of their playfellow, wind,—all these things held them back. It was noon when they raced down the hillside, first walking with balanced care, then leaping with excited shouts from rock to rock over a rough piece of ground that did not descend so sheer, and ending with a wild scamper down a stretch of turf. Cynthia won this time.

"It's a wonder we haven't broken our necks!" exclaimed she, breathless, busy with her hair, while Peter, looking back, registered a mental vow not to risk her precious limbs again.

They picked up the path beyond the turbary and walked steadily, crossing the stream at Butters Tor by the disused tin-streaming works, passing a farmstead and easily finding the path up Pridacoombe Downs. On the top they lost it, through skirting another turbary where there was soft ground—or else it had ended at the turf-stacks: at any rate they did not cross Pridacoombe on a path, and a swampy way they found it, especially when they dropped into a valley and made for the landmark of an apparent cart-track leading up a hill. This track led them through devious ways to Tolborough Farm, after giving them a view from the hill top of Bolventor's little copse and church and a few houses, only a mile or so away. At Tolborough Cynthia was frightened by a ferocious watchdog, whose master luckily was at hand to call him off. Whereupon Peter replaced in the hedge the mighty stone he had plucked forth, and all was peace.

The path led through the green wood, in whose borders a few anemones and foxgloves were growing, to Bolventor and the great high-road which they now suddenly perceived running right and left. This road pierced the

moor, joining Launceston and Bodmin. They were glad that it soon fled out of sight over the brows of low hills. Here in the centre of the moor, standing back from the white road behind a square courtyard which had welcomed many a weary traveller by coach or on foot, was the broad, squat building known as the famous 'Jamaica Inn,' of which many a smuggling story might be told and many a tale of highwaymen also. Peter found it—with regret—to be now a temperance hotel. He and Cynthia rested in the low-roofed parlour and admired the stuffed trout therein; it appeared that the hostelry was the resort of fishermen, and that the Fowey River, the source of which they had seen from Brown Willy, flowed near by.

Although in the centre of the moor, it was evident that Bolventor was buffeted by the winds, for the houses by the side of the road were slated in front as well as on their roofs. Peter was curious to know where the slates came from, but he did not stay to inquire, as on leaving the inn they had noticed storm-clouds advancing against the wind. Dozmary was still a moorland mile away. They shrewdly guessed that the distance would turn out double, and hurried on along a winding, open cart-road which was cut through rough heath and led steadily downhill. Just as they were making certain that they were lost they came suddenly upon the magic lake, low-banked, set plainly in the sloping, shadowy moors. The track brought them out upon the edge by the side of a single-storied cottage in front of which was a small landing-stage and boatshed. Now they could see the whole circle of the lake. They were standing on the pebbly strand at the edge of the clear, dark water under which a pebbly bottom shelved gradually away. Where were the 'bulrush beds' through which Sir Bedivere had thrashed to hurl Excalibur? They could not find them, and then their keen, young eyes discerned far across upon the right a patch of brighter green which told of reeds. So they were satisfied.

"But how wide the lake is!" exclaimed Cynthia. "I never thought it would be as big as this."

Peter measured it with a swimmer's eyes. "A quarter of a mile across," he said decisively.

"Arthur put out in this boat to get Excalibur." She had seated herself, and was reading.

"The Lady of the Lake lived in the middle, I suppose," said Peter, opening the packet of sandwiches. "Doesn't the guidebook say that the lake is bottomless?"

"I believe it does."

"I'd like to have a swim out there and see."

"Why don't you?"

"Will you wait?"

"Of course." So Peter, after finishing the sandwich he held in his hand, went to the house. He found that he could have the boat, but that they could not lend him a bathing costume, and he was too shy to proceed. He returned to Cynthia and made an excuse.

"We'll come again," he said.

"And then I'd like a swim. I want to look for the bottom, too."

"Have you got bathing things at home, Star?"

"No, but couldn't we go in to Camelford one morning? I *must* have a swim in the shining, enchanted lake. I'm hot as anything, now. King Arthur would have been simply baked in his armour on a day like this."

"There goes the merry old sun in again, and here's the first drop of rain. Shall we shelter or shall we start home?"

"Is that thunder rumbling? No, I'm not afraid of thunder. Peter, you are sweet to me always. You never think of yourself! We'd better start back I should say. Gracious! I never remembered that my sleeves were rolled up when I went into the inn. Well, it can't be helped now. Let's finish the sandwiches as we go."

Before they reached Bolventor they were both soaked to the skin. The raindrops were running down the girl's bare arms, her thin blouse clung to her, her masses of hair were damp and sleek. "I do hate looking like this before you," she said, and laughed from

sheer high spirits. "But the rain is awfully jolly. I don't often get a chance of a thorough wetting, I can tell you, Peter."

"You aren't a bit what I thought you when I met you in drawing-rooms," he said, admiringly. "You're such an open-air girl. I love your courage."

"Courage! I'm enjoying myself tremendously. But I'm lots of girls, Peter dear. There are twenty Cynthias and dozens of Rosemaries, all belonging to Peter."

"And Stars?"

"Only one." She put up her face to be kissed, but started from his side at the apparition of a cyclist clad in blue jeans, who emerged suddenly from a shed. On the instant his blue jeans became indigo-streaked with wet, and before he had mounted they were black and sopping.

"Have you ever noticed what silly things one says in ordinary conversation?" asked Cynthia, after a while. "I was just going to remark, 'It can rain on the moor when it does rain, can't it?' "

"It can," replied Peter, soberly; and then—going up past Tolborough—they were overtaken by a very cheerful youth with a sack upon his shoulder and a fork in his hand, on the way to spread top-dressing. He gave them the pleasantest possible grin and hurried ahead, singing out of tune.

By the time they had walked a mile further their shoes were squelching, black with peat-mud, and heavy. Progress was difficult on the open moor, where marshy patches had to be carefully watched for and avoided by means of detours. It was wonderful how quickly dry ground had changed into a swamp.

And as they plodded they found themselves discussing what Shaun would have said to their parents ("They are yours now, as well as mine!" said Cynthia). The girl was sure that Lady Bremner would return at once when she heard the news, and it was at least probable that she would send for Shaun. Peter thought it certain and expected to find a letter on their return with an account of the interview. Cynthia, however, was fearful

lest her father should have disposed of Shaun altogether. She did not in her heart of hearts take it for granted as Peter did that she would be forgiven almost immediately, and that all the anger would be directed against her young husband; therefore if Shaun were once eliminated from the affair there was a dreadful possibility—especially if the elopement became public before she met her people—that the breach might become absolute. All depended on Shaun's tact in a singularly difficult situation. She did not doubt Shaun, but she knew Sir Everard's habit of listening to the teller of a story without assisting him by questions, she knew the relentlessness of his cross-examination when the story was complete. It seemed well-nigh impossible that Shaun should say what he had to say without incriminating himself beyond the bounds of forgiveness, and then who would intervene? Not Alan, not her brother. He would cry out for punishment. Not her mother, who would be too shocked and overcome at the girl's disobedience. Cynthia felt sadly that only the fear of scandal would have much influence over Lady Bremner if Shaun failed; yet were Daddy to decide upon an attitude of hostility, she would follow him with scarcely a protest. She would not be conscious of her affection for Cynthia while Daddy remained angry and distressed. And he might cease to be angry and distressed too late!

Peter repeated over and over again that he was sure there would be a letter, but when they reached home—Radgells already was home—they found nothing awaiting them except a hearty welcome, and garments airing before the kitchen fire. There was no letter; and he was more greatly alarmed than he cared to say, for his hopes had been higher than Cynthia's, and he had expected Shaun to be frank. She read his mind, and cried, "He told us to enjoy our honeymoon, Peter! He won't write until it is all, all settled. Then Father and Mother will write as well." He prayed that she might be as hopeful as her words sounded, then proceeded to put aside his anxiety for her sake.

IX

THE days now were followed by white, moonlight nights. After they had been lying awake listening to a fox barking on Brown Willy they rose to see the sun mount from behind the eastern hills. There was a dimness in the valley and the stream ran silently. They stole along it walking barefoot in dew, shoes and towels in their hands, in search of a pool wherein they might bathe their bodies. They moved in silence, awed by the hush of night.

An owl hooted and they thrilled! The dusky scents of night rose to their nostrils. The young blood sang in their veins. They felt in themselves the mysterious stirring that runs through nature before the dawn. They were a part of nature and the great moon was paling overhead.

"The brook is too narrow," whispered Cynthia. "We shall not find a deeper place than this." Lightly clad, she knelt down before a pool into which a water rat had dived. His ripples vanished and her lovely image floated indistinctly beneath the silver surface, as she curved herself with palms upon the brink and bending white arms; her hair was upon her shoulders, tresses streamed below her rounded elbows. She stooped to the smiling eyes and her hair fell forward, drifting, and swiftly she dipped her head under, and started upright; then, gliding to a sitting posture, throwing back her dripping locks, began to bathe her slender white feet.

The round moon hid behind a cloud; face and limbs gleamed in the darkness. When it issued forth in glory, she was standing erect, a fair young Naiad—or the bright goddess Cynthia! And so did Peter name

her from the rock-rimmed basin where, stripped to the waist, he was performing the ritual of his ablutions. Moon-lit, in the warm air of the summer night, he, too, appeared a god. . . .

The two young lovers were running together up the mountain slope.

Now they leaned, panting, against the cairn, their backs toward Roughtor, gazing down upon the moor. He held a small, smooth hand in his and their shoulders were touching. Once he heard her murmur, "Happy . . . Happy!" at his side. The moonlight was fading. The sharpness of its silver on the distant hills was beginning to melt into gold, and now a pale streak of rose brightened above, outlining the craggy summits as though a jagged black line had been drawn against the sky. From the horizon pearly light soared upward, like the outspreading of hands that were lifting the veil of darkness. A lofty cloud grew pink.

The dawn wind was stirring; it flickered upon the cheeks of the watchers, and died away. Towards them, over the grassy downs, over the broad, turbulent bosom of the moor crept a quiet radiance. Now the hills stood out motionless and familiar; light began to flow over the ridges into the valleys. A lark shot up, triumphant; and the rim of the golden sun emerged, sparkling flames into the sky, flames which swept across overhead, leaped into all the world, and dazzled the lovers' eyes.

The sun mounted, a splendid conqueror. His disk almost cleared the distant hills as they turned reluctantly to go. Steadily he shone, and it was soft and dewy day.

X

"If you are expecting anything," said Cynthia, "you may be sure it will take good care not to fetch up until you've forgotten it." They were returning from an expedition to Camelford, and had just met Mr. Trerice upon the road driving an enormous sow. He had told them that a letter had come at last and beaming had passed along. They quickened their footsteps down the hill which leads to the border of the moor. Roughtor lay dark to-day with grey mist at his foot and a cloud streaking from his summit under a low and threatening sky.

"He knows!" said Peter. "The old lion knows our fate." His tone was very anxious, for he did not augur good from the long delay. Eight days had fled since they left London.

"Well, he won't tell. I had forgotten for a moment, that's why it's come."

"The woman is always the brave one. Though it means everything to you, your voice is firm and mine trembles. I wish I could take some of this anxiety away from you, darling."

"It seems to me you bear more than your fair share as it is! I'm not brave."

"Oh, you are!" His voice sounded quite reproachful. Not even Cynthia should dispraise Cynthia.

"I must say I should like a pair of seven-league boots. I wonder whether there *could* be a message from Mother!"

That day after shopping in Camelford they had walked up the valley along the swift-running trout-stream, through peaceful meadows and under shady trees. At last they had come to a clapper bridge where a road

crossed the Camel upon slabs of granite supported by piers of piled single stones without mortar, two piers being built into the banks, the inner two resting in the bed of the stream. On either side lanes dipped sharply to the level of the valley, which on ahead curved to the left, forming there a woody background to the old, primitive bridge. Ferns grew thick; ripples of reflected light quivered beautifully through the centre opening; the stones were grey and ancient, and the form of the structure, unspoilt by parapets, was satisfying and right in its graceful simplicity. The noise of the water rose like a song.

A chiff-chaff whistled from the trees as they turned to go. His call followed them monotonously, fainter and fainter, until it was not. Then a blackbird piped, and they met a tall fisherman trying the dark pools under the bank, casting lightly over a bramble bush. When they had left behind both him and the thrilling music of the bird, a thought had struck Peter and he had said—wrongly; but this they never knew—"Why, that was Slaughter Bridge! * Perhaps King Arthur and Modred fought across it."

Now as they hurried past the hut circles marked by a round of stones, almost running in their haste and pursued from point to point by the angry pipits and wheatears, the picture of the bridge danced before their eyes; while Cynthia saw behind it the face of her father frowning, and to Peter came glimpses of Department B that fitted in curiously with the gentler vision. The sinister figure of Mr. Lemon loomed in a corner, crouched massive over his roll-top desk; it was singular that while memory drew the desk sharp and clear, already the countenance of his foe was indistinct. Ghostly forms turned pitying looks upon Peter. He wrenched his mind away by an effort of the will, walking faster, outstripping the girl....

Peter gave the envelope to Cynthia, who clutched it. She hesitated, pale beneath her sun-tan, standing with

* The real Slaughter Bridge lies in the opposite direction from Camelford, northward. It has been strengthened and modernised, and its beauty is spoilt.

parted lips, frowning, then returned it to Peter. In the end they read it together, heads close.

Children,

Up to the present they are keeping it secret—partly my effort, partly their own unusual good sense.

Believe they are trying behind my back to find runaways' address, which I have of course denied having (so I can always call to ask for it!). Alan is the foe. Do not let anyone hear of you, until I give the word. This is important. You must not meet them yet.

I am assuring them I *daily expect to receive address. If time were increasing their anger I might give this, but I* believe *it is only increasing their anxiety—a good sign. Sir E. inscrutable. First interview hung in the balance. I just managed to maintain my hold on the tails of the acquaintanceship, and since then have gained ground. But he almost trapped me to-day by handing a letter and saying quite naturally, "This is to be forwarded. It is from her cousin, Joyce." I nearly betrayed myself through taking it without surprise, and had to feign stupidity. "It isn't so marked!" I exclaimed, as I handed it back. I could think of nothing better in the instant I had in which to recover myself and finished under his stare: "She doesn't know anything then. She hasn't even heard that Cynthia is away from home. What makes you think she expected it to be sent on anywhere, Sir Everard?" I thought I had got him, and did the last bit well, but no! He only replied gravely, "Joyce always writes to this address."*

Lady B. is well, and very self-controlled. I learn practically nothing of their intentions or points of view—supposing they have formulated either, which is uncertain. On the other hand I have managed to get through to both most that I wanted to convey.

Both seem indifferent to 'Great Company' incident. If Man has given his own account it has not succeeded. On other hand they are not great believers in Peter's future in journalism! I enclose seven guineas and will register this. Send me some more political caricatures, Home

Rule or Anti, in what I call the 'cat' style, but using any *animal type. I* must *have them regularly now. I'm keeping copies of the last lot in case you did not see them when they came out. But you must keep an eye on* The Times. *I have suggested ad. in Agony Column, forgiveness 'ad.,' to Lady B.*

When I think it wise to admit possession of address I will wire full instructions.

Wait and be patient. Be happy, you children, while you may (not ironic, this!). I believe all is going well; and remember your Mother is not *ill.*

S.

"All this can't last!" exclaimed Peter.

"He isn't a good letter-writer," sighed the girl. "He doesn't tell me any of the things I want to know." She was exceedingly disappointed.

So was Peter, but he began to defend Shaun. "He says that if he tries to make a letter literary he invariably finds himself embroidering facts, so that when he wants to tell the truth he just scrabbles!"

"Yes, I know."

"Of course you do, darling; I'm sorry!"

"No, don't be sorry. I was a pig. But I mean this. His letter may not be literary, but it's thoroughly artistic and really not much concerned with truth. He conceals all sorts of things, and is busy all the time giving the impression that he wants to give. Granted that he had to—really, he isn't scrabbling, Peter; he is being clever—still, there are heaps of little things he might have told me about Mother if he'd been what I call a good letter-writer, small gossipy things, how she looked and so on, things that mean an awful lot to me, which he might have included without betraying the things he wants to conceal!"

"Why, what do you think he wants to conceal?" expostulated Peter.

"That they're beastly about you, especially Mother." Peter saw her dear, dear face twitch pitifully like a child's with the effort to keep back tears. She was fum-

bling at her pocket. She sobbed into her handkerchief, sniffing unromantically; he had never loved her more. "I did . . . want . . . to hear . . . what Mummy said . . . about the letter I wrote her," she said, in little bursts. He pressed her disconsolate head against his waistcoat; he was almost as anguished as she, and she was the saddest girl! It seemed to her that even Peter did not altogether understand; and that Shaun did not know women at all or he must have told her. Shaun *must* have asked, "Did she leave no letter, then?" and even though Mummy had answered unkindly, still how much better it would have been to tell her outright. She wanted to hear any words that Mummy had spoken, any words; she must have said something kind, and if not, then something unkind would be easier to bear than this seeming to have no mother at all!

So sobbed the young wife on her husband's shoulder. Peter was distraught. He promised to take her home, to write to Sir Everard, to write to Shaun, and after a while Cynthia grew calm. They walked out in the evening and ordered *The Times* to be sent by post from Camelford; there was no message in that day's copy. Cynthia now declared her trust in Shaun, refusing to let Peter take desperate action. She seemed ashamed of herself—he did not know what for!—and on the whole cheerful. Next morning she was laughing again.

XI

She was laughing again, but usually after Peter had been caught gazing at her apprehensively, and her pallor made Mrs. Trerice exclaim, "My dear soul!" However Peter really trusted Shaun, and her faith in Peter was absolute, which he had not at present taken in, being modest by nature. After one more day she recovered her colour and became serene, outwardly free from care.

The wind was blustering and yelling about the house; and Mrs. Trerice was telling Peter the story of the big billy-goat horns over the door of the parlour. He had just shown her the twisted ram's horns which they had picked up on Brown Willy. She was saying: "When the cows are driven out on the moor a billy-goat goes up along with them, for 'tes said that a goat with the herd will keep the cows from slipping their calves. I can't tell whether 'tes true or no, but they hold to it hereabouts. Gwenneth and I found those horns on Brown Willy on the edge of the clitter where you found yours. We've found a bra' lot of horns there from time to time."

Now Cynthia joined them. She refused with grace to accept the gift of a pair, delicately offered. The woman and the girl had become close friends, for Cynthia understood her hostess's dearest wish and ambition, which was to live 'come by' * at the seaside town of Newquay. "I comprehend you without sympathy," Mr. James used to say about this; but from the beautiful, fascinating young lady Mrs. Trerice received the fullest sympathy and understanding. She loved the moor, and when she had had a homeful of children the loneliness had not seemed quite so complete. One after another they had grown

* By and by.

up and gone out to service or emigrated or enlisted. Gwenneth was the last; and she spent almost the whole of the day at school. Newquay was Mrs. Trerice's dream in the same way as in years to come the Moor might be Cynthia's. It appeared to her a place of peace and friendliness, from the recollections of a fortnight's visit. She loved, on the long winter nights when storms raved down the long slopes of Brown Willy and enveloped the house as in a whirlwind, dashing ceaselessly against the ramparts of bold Roughtor only to fall back baffled with howls of anguish, she loved then to think of the summer seas and of rows of little houses all containing people who would be kind and neighbourly: she loved to think that some day she might live there. And Cynthia had divined this from the way in which she said the name 'Newquay.'

Trerice would have pined in Newquay; there Gwenneth would no longer have loved school. For these reasons Mrs. Trerice kept silent. She was a happy-tempered, active person; no grumbler or nurser of grievances. Cynthia was proud of her friendship, and Peter learnt much about the girl he had married by watching her with the older woman, being instructed in the making of butter or in the mysteries of 'plain sewing.' Cynthia set to work to acquire these crafts in a practical manner, as though she meant to make use of them in the future. She was determined to fit herself to be a poor man's wife; and it was hardly the measure of her intellectual success in this direction that dressmaking and buttermaking ranked in her mind as weapons of equal value against the wolf which howls outside the doors of artists. Not that she saw herself churning in a little attic in Soho as part of the routine of housekeeping—Cynthia was not so ignorant. But she certainly had a romantic notion of some day earning money as a dairymaid to save Peter from starvation, which appeared almost as probable—at least almost as *realisable*—as that she would have to make her own blouses and skirts!

Now Peter was a careful soul who gazed into the future before dirtying his boots unnecessarily. Cynthia puzzled him by bringing out pair after pair of white shoes. One

day they were on Roughtor soon after sunrise, watching the light in a white sheet behind falling rain. The shower was approaching them, and they were in shelter. Said Peter, "Why do you always wear white shoes, Starry dear?"

Cynthia glanced first at her shoes and then at him, diffidently.

"Don't you think I can wear them? I won't if you don't like, Peter. I always thought my feet were small enough, but I daresay I was conceited."

Gulfs yawned before Peter. They closed, and he suddenly felt a very great responsibility.

"Of course you can, in that sense, Starry. No girl in the world has got such pretty feet as you. But who will clean them?"

"I was going to use them all up and then ask Mrs. Trerice for some pipeclay and do them myself."

"You are a darling!" said Peter, betraying that he had not thought of that solution of the matter. "But she won't have any pipeclay, you know."

"No more she will! We must get some when we go next into Camelford."

"And it's a tiring job. Have you ever tried it, Starry?"

"No. Now remember our compact, and don't ask me to let you do it for me, because I won't."

"I shouldn't have agreed to let you help in the housework, and do your share, and all the rest of it, if I'd imagined you meant to start by pipeclaying six pairs of shoes."

"I'm going to wash my clothes, too."

"Starry, you'll kill yourself! You always wear white. People who wash their own clothes don't wear white!"

"It's practice. I mean the washing. And I'm sure you are going to be successful, so I shan't have to do it always!"

Peter had a very shrewd idea that Mrs. Trerice would not allow her to do it once. He perceived dimly the extent of his young wife's inexperience and most clearly her courage. A problem was foreshadowed by his im-

mediate resolve to work on a political cartoon that day instead of drawing the scene which was before them. Peter had brought his water-colours to Cornwall, and found himself spending more and more hours in painting a tor seen uphill against the sky, or the view downward from a precipice, or grass blades waving against a blue vault as you see them when lying supine in a meadow. The obvious in composition did not appeal to him. And one day he was sketching in line after line of rounded, heather hills, backed by black lightning-jagged Kilmaur and Cheesewring, when a tourist with knapsack on back came silently and unperceived—for Cynthia was asleep—and looked over the artist's shoulder. All at once he tapped Peter on the arm, startling him so that he nearly fell off his campstool, and demanded in a deep, rough voice, "Who told you to do it that way, my boy?" Cynthia sat up with a jump.

Peter did not appreciate being called 'my boy.' Glancing round and up he saw an extremely insignificant elderly face, quite out of keeping with the powerful voice of the stranger. "No one," he said, civilly.

"The devil he did!" exclaimed the tourist.

"You've awakened my wife," said Peter, in a tone of dignified reproof.

"I'm not interested in your wife, sir!" retorted the other. "I am interested in your work. Call upon me in town in four weeks' time. I beg your pardon, madam." This to Cynthia who was still seated rubbing her eyes. "Have you got a pencil in your pocket, boy?"

"Do you mean me?" demanded Peter angrily.

"I see no other boy in the landscape."

Peter produced the pencil, just as Cynthia scrambled to her knees and sprang up with a little cry. The stranger grinned. "Don't give me away," he said to her; "I don't want to be bothered now." He snatched the block from Peter's knee to use as a pad, and wrote a name and address on a cigarette paper which he took out of the pocket of his Norfolk coat in company with a quantity of others loose amongst a tangled mass of string, bootlaces, coins, buttons, and fluff. "Your sketch hasn't

any value," he said to Peter soothingly, as the latter sprang up in a fury; adding in a businesslike voice, "But I think I'll teach you. Now be a sensible chap when you come, and don't offer me money. I couldn't stand that from a youngster. Ought I to remember you, madam?"

"You've never been introduced to me," Cynthia reassured him.

"Ah! I trust to have that pleasure later on." His tone had altered to a very charming, old-fashioned formality. "Good morning!" He bowed, pulled his battered slouch hat tighter on his head by way of a farewell salute, and marched swaggering down the hill.

"He doesn't take pupils as a rule!" said Cynthia, excitedly, when he had passed out of hearing.

"He won't take this one!" declared Peter, very indignant; but on reading the name on the paper which he held in his hand he turned all colours and cried out, "Jove!" Then he stared at his sketching block as though it contained the secret of life and death. "He said it has no value, and it can't have if he says so. I don't understand!"

"Well, he liked it and he liked you!"

"I'd have been off my stool and kneeling if I had known who he was! Cynthia, it's the most wonderful thing that ever happened to a man. Now that I come to think, of course he's the very chap to sympathise with what I was trying to do. Only I shouldn't have thought my colour was good enough to let him see."

"I should," said the girl, eyes bright and dancing.

He was caught by her loveliness, and stood gazing. "You are the most brilliant creature, Starry dearest. I wish I were a portrait painter."

She challenged this. "You don't."

"No, I don't really. Not to-day. But I say, I wish I wasn't going to be a cartoonist, then. After all I . . . How did you know? I've always loved landscape work best, but I don't see how you knew! Because I've bucked into this caricature job as hard as ever I could. I've tried to put every ounce of me into it. I had to take to portraiture more or less because I never got a chance

to use colours while I was in the Great Company—at least only frightfully seldom; and then Shaun said I could make money by developing a particular line, and —how did you know? You've never seen my old landscape portfolios, and I never showed them to Shaun, because they are kiddish and rotten, most of them." Peter had never made so long a speech in his life before.

She came and laid her cheek against his, murmuring, "I noticed things."

"What things?" He was still mystified.

"Darling, you've painted the moor, but never me; and a real portrait painter would have done just the reverse."

"But who could paint you, you Beautiful Thing?"

"You used to draw me, when you couldn't get landscapes. Who could paint the moor?"

"He can."

"Oh, well; you know what I mean."

"Yes, I do, and you are the cleverest!"

It will be observed that neither was Cynthia jealous of his work nor did Peter consider the possibility of her being so; he was more of an artist than he knew. Shaun would have rejoiced whole-heartedly at the little scene as a proof that they were suited to each other. They both wrote a long account to him, Cynthia's conclusion being, *I will try to be sensible, Shaun, but I would sooner go and be a lady's maid than spoil Peter's real work. He is sending you several cartoons.* Peter ended with, *Don't be too much afraid I'll be a beast. It was after a talk with her about white shoes that I became unselfish for about five minutes, and tackled the stuff for the weeklies.* Neither of them said much about the Bremners, only a few words of confidence in their friend.

All this time they were learning each other's small personal habits, tastes, and failings. Peter had a way of spilling the salt; he preferred mutton to beef and would not eat eggs if he could help it; he seemed to Cynthia extraordinarily sweet-tempered unless disturbed while smoking his after-dinner pipe, in which case he showed faint signs of irritation. By refraining from interfering

with this sacred ceremony it appeared she might be provoking as she pleased. She tried once or twice, just to see, and it was so. Moreover he never minded waiting while she changed, however long she took; nor did he object to giving his opinion to an unlimited extent on the becomingness of hats, though she had a way of flitting undecidedly from one to the other which Joyce had once warned her would bore her husband very much! "I'm not dressing *for* Camelford, exactly," she told him one morning, "but I want the Camelfordians to envy my husband. It seems much more difficult to make up one's mind when one has only four hats to choose from!" "I think them all equally jolly," he assured her gravely. He discovered to his surprise that it mattered how a hat was put on, and that the curve of a brim might be an affair of the deepest consideration. On the other hand, he found her a sporting girl, who would always dress in a hurry if there was need. When they saw a badger from their bedroom window in the early morning, she did not mind running out 'anyhow.' In her deshabille Cynthia could be artistic without effort. She had a natural instinct for dress. Peter noticed in fact that when attiring herself most carefully she generally returned to her first choice. After he had once remarked upon this the conferences before the looking-glass became much shorter, as Cynthia took the hint that he had not intended.

Also their personal and intimate relations, which at first had been far less embarrassing than either had dared to hope, but later had become subject to many reactions of cruel and perplexing shyness, recovered by degrees the quality of simple naturalness.

XII

THEY had crossed Roughtor Bridge and turned to the left through Watergate to Advent Church, intending to strike in to the moor again at the Devil's Jump Gorge and, making a round by King Arthur's Hall, go home by Garrow, which would be a walk of eleven or twelve miles unless they lost their way; and with so short a day's tramp before them they could afford to go leisurely through the summer lanes and halt at every stile. The green hedges were moist from a shower, and the sun drew out the fresh scents of honeysuckle and dog-rose and sweetbrier. Here and there a clump of gorse was flaming, and tall foxgloves were ringing their purple bells which only the fairies and true lovers can hear, scarcely praised by Peter and Cynthia, who were absorbed in each other and a thrilling discussion of where they should live in the future, which brought echoes of rattling London streets and visions of Hampstead and Soho. They came to a mill, where the song of a thrush above the laughing water won them back to the present of quiet places and golden sunshine and pale-blue sky.

On consulting the map they found they had overshot the path, but this was the Camel River; if they went to the left, down stream, they would reach a tributary which flowed from the Devil's Jump Gorge. So they scrambled over the parapet of the stone bridge and dropped into the meadow, and pursued their way, trespassing, along the clucking, singing, hurrying water; past lofty flags and bulrushes, and dark trout-pools, and swirls round the corners of curving banks; through hedges, and over them sometimes by the help of a friendly tree, anyhow, any way to avoid turning back. Once they crossed a narrow field in the middle of which

a great bull was grazing. He raised his head and looked at them wickedly and snorted, then bent to his meal again. And they caught a glimpse between two willow-bushes of the blue flash of a kingfisher's flight, and startled a brace of mallards, which broke away whirring; but they saw no otter, although they watched for him, moving craftily. Neither did they meet a man who might reprove their trespass.

After half a mile they arrived at the junction of the streams and, following the tributary, came almost immediately to a farm track and the crossing; thence, bearing wide of marshy ground overgrown with rank vegetation, reeds and willow-shrubs, took a path that led towards the mouth of the gorge. The song of the water came to them louder and more rapid, and now they had a full view of the great crags facing each other on high across the ravine; one, which jutted out from black, waste earth, was poised castle-like on the brow of a precipice; the other—that on the slope which they were approaching—emerged, like a wall of granite piled by giant hands, from among rich, green bracken and projected above the almost sheer descent to the torrent. This side of the gorge was well wooded below, with oak and mountain ash and sycamore and dense-growing withies and tangled bush, under which the bracken was spreading waist-high. They found the thicket impassable in the shadow by the water and struck upward, away from the taller trees, clambering with difficulty into sunlight up an incline as steep as the roof of a house and clittered with moss-hidden boulders beneath the green, branching fronds of the bracken. Slowly they ascended to the level of the mighty mass of granite, and when they had attained it at last, Cynthia would not be satisfied without climbing on the rock. She balanced her way airily out onto the overhanging crag at the end, while Peter, his heart in his mouth, edged cautiously behind her.

Over their heads a heron sailed majestically. Opposite was the castle-crag, and below rushed the stream, looking like cotton-wool, so far down it was; seeming motionless, but clattering with a steady uproar over its stony

bottom. For half a mile the gorge ran straight, then curved sharply away at a point where it was still cleft deep into the moor. The sky was grey, shadows brooded over the glen, for the last, fitful gleam of sunshine had departed. The tops of the birches and sycamores, below to the left whence they had come, were shivering mistily. As they had climbed they had left behind them the cooing of wood-pigeons and the harsh, distinctive cry of the woodpecker; here was no sound save the rattle of the torrent, which ascended to their ears in a musical and threatening murmur. "It's going to rain," said Cynthia, prosaically. Turning, she saw that Peter had crawled back on hands and knees, and was about to imitate him when she glanced at her skirt and hesitated, then walked beautifully back. After all, she knew that Peter was not jealous!

Then they broke their way through the bracken to a rock where a great crevice promised shelter, and in front of it crushed down a carpet of bracken with their sticks, so that the scent of the sap rose strong. And there they took their meal, startled once by the sudden, noiseless flight of a goatsucker from near by, and there they fell to talking.

First Peter discovered that Cynthia had always wanted a fox-terrier, but no dogs had been allowed in the Bremner household since one had bitten Alan when he was a little baby. The subject was full of interest.

Then the nature of the prohibition emerged. Sir Everard had given an order, which through lapse of time had acquired the force of a moral law. "I think—you know, about us,—that Daddy might give in, if only Mummy doesn't take it for granted he won't." She said this sadly, for she knew how often parents—and hers in particular—harden each other's resolves in this manner. From that, easily, they found themselves discussing Shaun.

Now, during the past fortnight, in the peace of their moorland life, and with their new knowledge of each other's natures, for Peter had by this time learnt the underlying simplicity of his wife's character and loved

her the more for it, they had both begun to criticise the subtle methods of Shaun. Cynthia was open and candid now, with her back to the world, her hand in Peter's and her face towards Paradise; she felt within her courage to stand against her parents and wondered why she had feared to confront them before. She longed for the sound of their voices; yet she did not think that they were friendly towards her, and when Peter said, "I notice you do not rush for *The Times*," she answered without hesitation:

"They won't advertise in *The Times*! Shaun doesn't understand them, and I don't believe they forgive me a bit. Anyhow they wouldn't use the Agony Column of *The Times*. It isn't like them."

Peter was given a shock by this outspokenness. He had first of all accepted Shaun at Cynthia's high valuation, but whereas the girl had learnt to disparage Shaun's cleverness by contrasting it with Peter's straightforwardness (aided thereto largely by Shaun's own self-sacrificing efforts) Peter himself with greater knowledge of the man had gained increased respect for his character. He did not attempt to make any comparison between his friend and his wife.

"I think he's clever enough," he answered, "don't you? That is only some game of his, which we don't understand. What I feel is, first that it is horribly rough on you not to give you news of your Mother, and secondly that I ought to be there in his place. Now that the Great Company is left behind I'd like to be absolutely straight about every mortal thing until the end of my life."

"Exactly!" said Cynthia. "The last thing, I mean. I don't care about myself so much, Peter; but I've watched you being worried, and I hate it."

"And I've seen you."

"Well, he oughtn't to. Shaun likes intrigue for its own sake. I believe he's going too far."

"Starry, you're a bit cruel!"

"Oh, Peter, I'm not! But since I've known you, and his personality hasn't dominated me in the way it used

to do, I've got a higher standard of behaviour, I think. Don't imagine I'm blaming Shaun! I'm not such a beast—quite—for we owe him everything. But I see things differently from him. Anything that happens wrong now is my fault for being such a coward."

"It's mine for leading you wrong!"

She nestled to him. "I've been talking like an awful prig," she whispered. "I expect I'd be a coward again if I were back. But I don't feel so, Peter. You've taught me better."

"I! . . . Darling! . . . Darling! You mustn't say things like that. It's you who teach me."

While they were talking the rain had begun to fall, pittering on the crushed stems of the bracken which lay before the great cleft, in which they were seated as in the entrance to a cave; when they leaned back, stooping their heads to avoid the overhanging rock, they were sheltered. They could see a slope of wet, shining bracken, and then the gulf, and beyond, black cliff; from below mounted the noise of the torrent, seeming now more distant. And as they were digging a hole to bury the paper from their lunch the sound abruptly ceased; they looked up and saw that a curtain of thick white mist had fallen before their hiding-place, shutting them off from the world completely. The raindrops no longer pattered upon the bracken, and they were alone.

The dew pearled on Cynthia's silken hair, her cheeks were cold but rosy, the muslin of her blouse clung damply to her arms, and when, too late, she rolled her sleeves high, they were sodden and dripped long drops down her lovely, rounded upper arms, drops that ran over her bent elbows (her hands were joined upon her lap) and slowly crept to her slender wrists. "We're getting soaked!" said Peter, and they were about to go, when they heard behind them a musical, sustained cheeping and chippering like the sound of water gurgling out of a narrow-necked jug, on two high notes with occasionally others interjected, in a way that gave the song a peculiar rippling quality. Cynthia turned and slipped to her knees, reckless of her dress. "There must be a little

bird inside," she whispered, searching the crannies with her eyes, and then they saw, running to and fro in a desolate way, a tiny field mouse, who was flicking his whiskers agitatedly as though he knew they had wronged him. "Oh, pretty!" cried the girl, and he seemed so tame that she put out her hand to stroke him, when in a brown flash he went, and his tail hung outside a cranny and twitched and was gone.

"I wish he would have stayed!" cried she, woe in her grey eyes as Peter saw, looking down at the beautiful, upturned face. "We must get on," he answered, for he saw that her cheeks were white as her forehead and only her lips retained their colour. She rose obediently and they hurried out into the mist.

Four times they turned their backs on the gorge and returned to it again, thrashing their way through the bracken, having unconsciously moved in a circle, but on the fifth attempt they found the open moor. He was loving her more than ever. What a comrade she was! Laughing although soaked to the skin, and even stopping to dig up groundnuts; which she recognised by the white circle of flowers on the single stem, and pointed out to him joyously!

They had three miles to go across wild country, following cart-tracks and making short cuts through the whins and over desolate stretches of tussocky heathland where they took the risk of encountering bog. The mist appeared again and again to be on the point of lifting. It swirled by; it vanished before them, giving a glimpse of the track ahead; it wrapped itself about their shoulders, settling close as a cloak, muffling them in a sheet of vapour from head to foot so that they felt cut off from each other and from the world; and then it would brighten from grey to whiteness with a promise of sunshine. Once it lifted above the outstretched necks of a noble string of geese, waddling across the path with gaping bills. The sullen bark of a watchdog came from near by, where farm buildings gloomed and suddenly disappeared. "Treswallock!" said Peter, bending over the map. He was wrong, and they found themselves climb-

ing Alex Tor, a mile too far to the left. Then, turning to the right across Treswallock Downs, they overshot the mark again and lost themselves in avoiding a herd of bullocks which thundered past in the greyness, and came at last to Irishes where they were directed back to the brow of the hill. As they reached it, the sunlight descended in flashing splendour, and there below them lay Candra Farm, its front garden aflame with yellow roses and gay fuchsias, with a white climbing passion-flower over the porch and a side garden radiant with damask roses and sweet, old-fashioned flowers; and at the foot of the rise beyond it moved a gentle brook. So the way was clear and they marched on into the heart of the moor.

From the next rise King Arthur's Down lay outstretched, broad and flat, and in places marshy, and beyond rose Hawkstor and Garrow Tor. Far away on the left the head of Roughtor frowned: hills ringed the plain, with the mist still caught from their craggy summits and the sunshine hiding itself again behind them. Peter and Cynthia walked straight on, passing a tumulus, towards a long low mound in the very centre of the green expanse, a line of darker colour in the distance, from which an edging of white stones seemed to project. "It must be King Arthur's Hall!" said Cynthia, as they approached it, and Peter spelled out from a rain-washed slip of paper the information he had copied from an old Parish Guide belonging to Mrs. Trerice. "Supposed to have been a hunting-hall; undoubtedly was once roofed over. Has been used of late years as a shelter for cattle."

"Mrs. Trerice said that was wrong."

"What was wrong?"

"She said the place filled with water in winter, and until the farmer had it drained cattle used to get drowned there sometimes."

Now they climbed the side of the apparent mound and looked down into a hollowed place about thirty feet by eighteen, with a soft bottom and a pool of water at one end. The slabs of stone they had seen formed supports to the sides and might have once held up a light plank-roofing.

"How King Arthur avoided being swamped out every time it rained, I can't imagine," was Cynthia's practical comment. "I really cannot believe that his hunting-parties ever dined here."

"A stone floor and very elaborate roof would do wonders," said Peter in a doubtful tone.

"I expect it was a swimming-pool!" laughed Cynthia.

"What makes you call it swimming-pool instead of swimming-bath?" asked Peter, curiously. "Isn't that American?" They had turned away from the Hall and set their faces in the direction of home.

Now Cynthia's Welsh friends had testified to her power of being cattish in a nice way, which included the faculty, in certain humours, of teasing; and it is a fact that a thoroughly wet girl is not usually a normal girl. She may be cross, or she may be hilarious, or she may be depressed, but certainly she will be exposed to the influence of moods. Cynthia, for no reason at all, replied archly, "Somebody taught me," and immediately regretted it; then Peter's astonished look amused her so much that instead of apologising she teased on—very daintily and not in the least in the style of Phyllis Peto, but still in a manner foreign to his experience of her. She did not coquet with his jealousy; there was no depth in her play, which was entirely a matter of words. She was neither rude nor tactless; yet the novelty startled Peter. He was tired, and he answered clumsily; and so all of a sudden uprose a flare of quarrel beginning with "I will!" and "You won't!" and mounting rapidly to tragic airs and "Please let me walk by myself, Peter!"

At first she meant only half of what she said, and he repented all he said. They wound up with silence and despair in their hearts and a kind of bitterness which did not seem real except when directed against themselves. And yet they tramped on obstinately, with chins held high; and two broad lines marred Cynthia's forehead and Peter's frown brought two upright furrows above his nose. Then Cynthia slipped into green bog-water over her ankles and Peter came to pull her out; suddenly she laughed with a tremor of tears in her voice and when

he had helped her to firm ground clung to him with her head bent low and by the droop of her neck he knew she was ashamed. He wished to drop at her feet, but she held to him and for one moment they were clasped like wrestlers, he wondering at her supple strength; and then they fell apart, laughing hysterically and understanding each other. "My dear!" "My dear!" They stood upright, lips on lips.

XIII

On reaching home they found a scribbled note from Shaun, of the most disquieting nature, containing a split infinitive and two errors in punctuation. He referred to Providence as a Character, himself as a poor ass, and apostrophised the misfortune of having to trust to two such broken reeds. *Sir Everard is on your track, through young Alan. I found him (the latter) nosing at Waterloo. Qu'il nose! They are searching, but they must not find. Remember* must not! *I will take all blame. If they should unexpectedly arrive do not fail to let them damn me utterly. You will not know what has happened so keep a still tongue and listen. I am not done. I will turn defeat to victory! Be prepared to glide away. Keep your tents folded, and buy milk chocolate, and set a skin-clad watcher peering from the rocks of Roughtor!*

Your old, desperate

Shaun.

Afterthought: Pat Gwenneth on the head. My respects to Mrs. Trerice and tell Trerice I have inquired what price the brindled sow did fetch.

"Brindled sow!" exclaimed Peter. "Trerice hasn't a brindled sow! I wish he would think a bit more of what you are going through and write a decent letter for once." He was almost shaken in his allegiance,—precisely the effect which Shaun had intended.

Cynthia showed deeper insight. She shook her head, saying, "He's clever. He isn't really careless." But then and there, in her sopping wet clothes, she sat down and wrote to Shaun asking him to let her go straight to her mother or else write to her father. Peter signed the

letter too, after he had added in a postscript, "It would be I who would see Sir Everard, of course." Mr. Trerice, who happened to be going to the station, undertook to post it. " 'Twill go off come by," he said, "not to-day likely, but fust train to-morrow. You shouldn't sit about in they wet things of yourn, miss, if you'll forgive me saying so. Gwen was terrible slight with a cold she caught that way." And Mrs. Trerice, coming in from the fowl-run, rushed Cynthia off to bed.

Next morning troubles seemed small things, unworthy of attention in a sunny world. They settled to take no decisive step until they had heard from Shaun, and after helping Mrs. Trerice and Gwenneth, who was on holiday, to fork over the ground where the new potatoes had been dug, they thought they would have a swim in Dozmary. The walk was a hot one under a fair, cloudless sky of deep and tender blue. The moor faded serene into hazy distances; underfoot, the grass was emerald-green after yesterday's rain; larks were carolling, filling the air with song and the lovers' hearts with lightness.

They secured the boat, by arrangement with the people of the cottage which faced the lake. Peter put in the bundle of towels and handed the girl aboard; as he did so, observing her immaculate white shoes. "She wouldn't let you clean them, would she?" he asked, referring to Mrs. Trerice of course, and Cynthia had to acknowledge no, but she said that she had done two pairs before Mrs. Trerice detected her. "They aren't so good!" said rueful Cynthia. Then the couple rowed out to the centre of wide Dozmary where the water was clear and very deep. Looking over they could see no bottom, and they shipped their oars, and managed to undress, with their backs to each other; and when they turned, the girl was slim in dark blue and Peter mighty in a brown costume. Cynthia was feeling shy in hers, which was scantier than she had worn before; she had chosen it because it was easy to carry.

"Can you dive?" asked Peter.

"Can't I!" cried Cynthia, joining finger tips on high and taking an expert header. She rose, swam a few

strokes with effortless grace, and turned on her back. "It's cold!" she said, but Peter was in mid-air. "Is anyone about?" she inquired anxiously when his head appeared above water. "I didn't dare to look."

"Not a soul," he gasped. "Besides, what does it matter? I say, you can swim well, Star!"

"Don't you think it's awfully impudent of us to bathe in King Arthur's pool?" exclaimed Cynthia. "Won't the Lady of the Lake be angry with us?"

"She's made the water cold enough!" said Peter.

He ordered a race, gave her too long a start and lost. "Out quick, now! Into the boat, darling!"

"Yes, but how?" wailed Cynthia, clinging to the thwart and trying to raise herself high enough to vault over the side.

"Try the stern," said Peter, who was already across it, and he lent her a hand and helped her to clamber in and swathed her in an enormous towel.

As he had expected they were fully dressed before they saw the people of the house again, and then having made the boat fast and thanked them, they set out, munching sandwiches. They rested not far from the pool, looking up to the heights of Browngelly. Peter sat down and drew off his coat to serve as a pillow, for he was drowsy. Cynthia, too, made preparations for repose and coolness. She slipped off shoes and stockings, rolled up her sleeves to the shoulders and, elbows upflung, sank back in the long, dry grass, clasping her naked arms behind her head. The sun beat down with a savage glare of heat. Grasshoppers chirped. The air was still; and out of sight on the moor cattle were lowing.

"I'm so happy I can't get to sleep," said Peter, turning over to the other side to look at his young wife.

Cynthia raised her face all flushed with slumber, like a child awaked, and began to rub her blinking eyes. She sat up.

"I'll talk to you," she said teasingly, "and then you'll have no difficulty!"

"Where did you learn to swim, you clever girl? Tell me that."

"We had a teacher at school—Joyce's school, you know. She was a Swede. I learnt from her. I can't swim much."

They were within sight of the road which led to the pool and from the distance came the humming of a motor. Peter also was sitting up, as he said: "You jolly well can! I remember Joyce telling me and I thought she was piling it on. Why on earth didn't you bathe with Alan and me at Tintagel, when we asked you?"

The purring sound was nearer. Cynthia sank back and answered, "I should have, if Mother would have let me. But I'm nothing out of the ordinary, Peter! You can't have seen a good girl swimmer before, or you wouldn't be surprised at me. I'll tell you about the best I ever met, and then you'll understand I'm nothing at all! I can, because I wrote about her to Shaun and tried to make the description literary."

"Go ahead!" said Peter, lazily. He lay back recumbent, an instant before the car whirred over the hill. They were stretched invisible as it passed by.

"You must not interrupt now, please!" began Cynthia. "I call her

THE LADY OF FOWEY,

where we were yachting. She was a tallish girl, who was married, I think, for I saw a man walking with her once —lanky and happy with a clever face; altogether rather nice—who was behaving like a husband. She was about my age, good-looking, and not very well dressed when I met them out. I daresay she had made her skirt herself. I only got a glimpse of her, as they passed me quickly, coming round a corner, and she had a sunbonnet on.

"This girl was staying at one of those nice houses on the cliff; one which had steps at the end of its garden down the rocks to a diving-board projecting at a considerable height above the water from a kind of stage, and on to a concrete landing-platform at the bottom. Now Alan and I used to fish in the early mornings from a boat which we sculled along the shore, and we were out

one day just after sunrise, and saw her come in a long cloak and barefoot through the wicket gate at the top, and spring headlong down those steps as though she wanted to break her neck; but she was so sure-footed she arrived safe at the diving-stage, and then she threw off her cloak and stood with only a short scarlet costume on. I did envy her when she ran out on to the plank, gave a tremendous leap into the air, turned a somersault gracefully and easily, her body revolving upon her shoulders and arms as on a pivot, and with another half turn shot headforemost into the water without a splash. And she swam, oh so powerfully! She was wearing a scarlet cloth knotted over her hair, which was yellow, much fairer than mine and very curly. We could see the scarlet, bobbing thing, one white arm after the other rising beside it, pass far into the rough sea beyond the harbour mouth. What do you think of my narrative style, Peter?

"We saw her several mornings running, and one day when she swam close I called her, inviting her to dive from our boat. She thanked me and swung herself in as lightly as possible without looking at Alan's hand outstretched to help her. Not like me just now! Up she came over the side and, oh Peter, she was beautiful! I did envy her again. She had sweet, brown eyes and a very candid, attractive face, and she was absolutely perfectly made, muscular as anything, but with lovely slidey slippery muscle that didn't cause her to look big or ungraceful. Her arms were as rounded and smooth as a statue's, and her legs and feet perfect too, and her skin snowy white, and all her movements easy and supple. She could be deliberate or ever so swift and it was equally beautiful to watch.

"She sprang on the bow seat, and balanced herself on her toes, raising her wet, gleaming arms; I noticed she looked slender, standing up: then she leapt backwards and curved herself in the air, how shall I say? like a whip-lash, it was so quick, and went in headforemost, without a splash. You know how clear the water is at Fowey. We looked over and saw her dart underneath

our boat and rise on the other side with her hands in front of her. When I said something in praise of her swimming she just laughed and said she'd had a lot of practice; and then up went her white heels again and down she shot to the bottom, tremendously far under. We could see her clinging there to a rock, head downward, legs above her; she relaxed her hold and slipping over on her back swam slowly up towards the surface. Peter, she was as at home in the water as a fish! She could shoot in any direction under water with her hands behind her back, and she turned somersaults with her knees up to her chin, swimming with her hands with arms outstretched, and she extended her limbs and turned more somersaults head over heels and heels over head, and did what they call the 'rolling log,' floating and revolving herself on her own axis rapidly and easily, and then she came up to take breath. 'Good-bye,' she said. 'Thank you so much for letting me dive.' And off she swam, arm after arm over her head, at a tremendous speed. You wouldn't think much of me if you'd seen her, Peter, really!"

The car had just passed back and Cynthia sat up to look after it.

"Wasn't she a professional?" asked Peter. "It's a ripping description of yours."

"She was a lady. She seemed awfully nice."

She failed however to retain Peter's interest. He preferred to play with his wife's hair, which was hanging down her back to dry. "It's pretty!" he murmured admiringly. "You ought always to wear it like that, Star."

"Oh, silly, silly Peter," laughed Cynthia, bright-cheeked, and then he kissed her and they were very youthful and happy and played with a grasshopper who came to rebuke them. Oh, the joyful hours!

Soon, in a moment it seemed, the time was come to start home. The shadows were beginning to lengthen upon Minzies Downs. Reluctantly they dragged their footsteps from the enchanted spot. "What a holiday!" sighed Peter. "You took it for granted that I knew

Fowey, but I've hardly been away from London for years and years."

She stroked his arm in sympathy. "Poor Peter!"

And then they came to Jamaica Inn and Cynthia asked her kind husband to buy her a glass of lemonade. Peter in a large spirit of generosity offered her a barrelful, and they entered the parlour laughing. The girl who came to take their order exclaimed when she saw them, "Did you meet the gentleman, sir?" The laughter died on their lips.

"What gentleman?" demanded Peter.

"The gentleman in the motor, mum," the girl replied to Cynthia's frightened, questioning gaze.

"I thought I heard a car go by. Was he driving himself?"

"Yes."

"Well, he must have passed close to, but I didn't notice him. Did you, Cynthia?"

"I was telling you about the Lady of Fowey." Cynthia had expected to hear a hoarse croak, but her voice was as silvery as ever. Almost for the first time in her life she heard it self-consciously, and realised that it was beautiful.

"Luckily I knew you were Mr. and Mrs. Middleton and I told him you had gone down to the Pool, for John had seen you go by."

"Who was he, and what did he want?" asked Peter. "Was he a youngish, clean-shaven chap with sandy hair?"

"Shaun isn't exactly youngish," said Cynthia under her breath, though she knew all the time it was not Shaun.

"He didn't tell his name, sir," explained the girl. "He was a stranger to me; an old gentleman with big eyebrows, not so old perhaps, but getting on in years. He was tall and spare and had a quiet commanding sort of way with him and took an interest in the cases of stuffed trout in the hall."

"Yes, but what did he want with us?" persisted Peter.

The girl seemed surprised. "I can't tell, sir, I'm sure! But he wanted to know where you was staying

and I told him Radgells and I hope I did right, mum. He looked such a gentleman, sir, and I'm sure I didn't mean no 'arm!"

"No, no, of course!" said Peter, as heartily as he could. "Is he driving round to Roughtor Bridge, do you suppose?"

"He didn't say, sir. I didn't see him when he came back."

"We'd better get home at once," said Peter to Cynthia, "and wait for him. No time for ginger beer!" "I had to get you out of it," he went on as soon as they were in the open air, where the sunshine came as a surprise and its friendly warmth astonished them because it was unchanged. "Your eyes are like two saucers, darling! They are blue-grey like the sea."

They got into the little copse below Bolventor and sat down to talk it over. Cynthia was trembling.

"That swimming girl may have changed the whole of our lives!" she said. "It would have been awful if Dad had caught us, all unprepared as we were."

"Are we going to meet him, that's the point," said Peter. "We both wanted to, yesterday."

"It's quite different, his catching us, from my writing or going to Mother, isn't it, dear?"

She was pitifully afraid and anxious to convince herself, he could see. Nor did he himself feel much bolder. It certainly was awkward that they had heard so little news from Shaun, who would only get their letter in the evening. Suddenly Peter remembered that they did not know where Sir Everard was staying, and he ran back to inquire whether the gentleman had left an address. He had not, but the girl had recognised the car as a hire-car from the King's Arms at Camelford, and with this information Peter hastened back to Cynthia.

Finally they decided to hurry to Radgells and, after assuring themselves by means of a detour that no car was waiting at Roughtor Bridge, to snatch a meal and secure a respite by telling Mrs. Trerice they would be out until after midnight. The worst of it was that Sir Everard, having had nearly an hour's start, would be at Camel-

ford by this time, and if he went straight on to Radgells he might arrive before them, in which case they would be compelled to lurk and watch him off the premises. Mrs. Trerice would offer him tea no doubt, which he might or might not accept; Cynthia thought it far more likely that he would have a cup of tea at the King's Arms before going on.

Fear lent them wings. They covered four miles in five and thirty minutes and won the race. Hardly had they reached the watch-tower of Roughtor, bearing with them their tea and supper, both in one, with a jug of cider, than a car rushed down the straight road to Roughtor Bridge, scattering the cattle and ponies which were watering at the ford. A figure emerged from the tonneau, and appeared to give instructions to the chauffeur. "Can it be Daddy?" Cynthia whispered as though the small, black speck might overhear.

Peter's voice sounded extraordinarily loud. "He was driving himself this morning." He lowered his tone to a murmur. "I believe that's a bigger car."

"He's coming across the bridge. How long will it be before we can be sure?"

"A quarter of an hour perhaps," said Peter, "unless you are able to recognise his walk a very long way off."

"There goes the car!" exclaimed Cynthia, clutching him. But it only backed and turned and stood waiting. Peter felt how she began to tremble.

"We won't go down," he said comfortingly, having been on the point of proposing to go, in obedience to the natural impulse which leads a man to confront a visible danger. He had little doubt that it was Sir Everard.

"It *might* be Shaun," said Cynthia. "It *might*. Even though the car's still there——"

"Shaun!"

"It might be."

Peter had not considered the possibility and he stared at the small figure slowly approaching across the moor, until it danced before his eyes. Cynthia's sight was finer

than his and she cried out "It isn't Shaun," when the distance had been half covered. "I believe . . . I think it's Alan," she said a moment later in a tone of sheer wrath, which caused Peter, although he was a peaceable individual, suddenly to feel pugnacious.

"Oh, I say, the muscle on your arm!" The girl's hand which had been gripping it unconsciously withdrew startled, and she turned wide eyes on him.

She was peeping round the corner of rock. She held her breath, crouching stiff. "It's Father!" she said, relaxing, and again she spoke in a whisper, shaken by something between a sigh and a sob.

"Yes." Peter, too, was intent on the plain and the solitary approaching figure. It was Sir Everard without a doubt, and he would pass directly below them, as he was bearing close in under the head of Roughtor, having left the track.

"Will he come up?" asked Cynthia.

"He must have been told to go round. He must. Yes, there he turns! He's found the going too rough and is striking outward. By Jove! Here's Trerice!"

The short broad form of Mr. Trerice, in his best clothes, with Gwenneth frolicking about him, had come into sight round the Tor. High above, hasty whispers were exchanged. "Can he guess where we are, darling?" "No, I only said we were going out to see the moon rise." "Starry, there isn't any moon to-night." "That doesn't matter, surely!" "Yes, it does. They may think we'll find out our mistake and come in early." . . . "No, no. Daddy won't wait so long, I'm sure. The sun hasn't set yet."

The sun was descending magnificently upon the western hills, flooding the world with soft light; and in the foreground of the landscape Mr. Trerice and Sir Everard steadily approached one another. Would they pass? No, they stopped, and in the still air faint sounds of conversation mounted to the watchers on the crag. Sir Everard had hailed Trerice: he stayed talking a long time and Gwenneth crept close and stood at gaze. Now Sir Everard took something from his pocket, and

Trerice's hand went up in salutation towards the brim of his hat. Sir Everard was turning back. He swung round on his heel, and Trerice and Gwenneth also turned, retracing their steps, and disappeared soon in the direction of Radgells.

When the motor-car had vanished over Poldue, Peter and Cynthia sat up and looked at each other with set and blanched faces. Now that the danger was over for the time, they became aware of the full weight of their responsibility and misliked it sadly. . . . But before they stole back under a deep and starry sky they had decided, from loyalty to Shaun, to flee upon the morrow. The scents of the garden crowded thick upon them like memories; the latch clicked and they moved out of the dark and solemn mystery of the night and entered the blacker, narrower mystery of the house. They tiptoed into their sitting-room. Peter struck a match, trembling; but set a flame to the candle with steady fingers, for he had caught sight of what was to be feared.

In the centre of the striped tablecloth lay a small, white card, on the back of which were scrawled in an unformed hand the following words, which Cynthia read looking over Peter's shoulder—*This gentellman came when you were out. He is at the King's Arms.* She happened to glance up at the mirror above the mantelpiece and saw ghostly therein her grave and tender beauty with Peter's dark head beside, and the thought crossed her mind, "This is the end of my youth." She was too young to know that it was nothing more than the end of her honeymoon.

XIV

THEY were up by six o'clock, resolved to abandon their heavy baggage to the enemy and to flee to some town from which they could keep him under observation while they communicated with Shaun, but they had been discussing morals and 'what is best for you, darling' and therefore were still without a definite plan, except that they would tell Mrs. Trerice they were going on tramp for a short time. Luckily the day, though blusterous, was fine and warm.

With large natural genius they bustled Mrs. Trerice so that she had not time to ask about the strange gentleman, and what she should say to him if he called again; and Trerice was out at work when they came down. They were clever enough to guess that Sir Everard had said little in order that he might not afterwards seem to have made a secret of the relationship. There was in the mind of Mrs. Trerice no suspicion that his arrival accounted for the departure of her guests. Indeed they escaped without one mention of him, by eating in the kitchen with haste, and avoiding the necessity to enter the sitting-room. In their innocence of intrigue, however, they overlooked two points of importance, the first being that they would lose Shaun's reply, which would probably have been posted the night before, and the second, that Sir Everard's visiting card was now reposing in Peter's pocket. If the latter could have foreseen their success in directing the thoughts of Mrs. Trerice solely upon matters of food and raiment, their evasion without a single word that referred to the strange visitor, of course he would have left it upon the table. Both these oversights they discovered in the afternoon, near to the peculiarly-balanced pile of rocks

called The Cheesewring, ascribed with equal justice to Satan or King Arthur by the older dwellers on the moor.

They had walked a good ten miles to see The Cheesewring before they left the neighbourhood, and it was worth while, they decided; but what to do next was not so easy to settle. They were naturally ignorant that Shaun had wired to them since their departure and that Sir Everard was in possession of the telegram, which he had secured from Mrs. Trerice. On the contrary, they were expecting no reply until next day. Nor in their wildest imaginings would they have guessed the contents of the telegram, nor that Shaun had written to Sir Everard giving him their address at Radgells. The tangle was complete; and it had arisen because they did not foresee at the beginning that Shaun might learn of Sir Everard's arrival at Camelford from Lady Bremner before any announcement of theirs (and they had sent none as yet) could get to him; otherwise they would have confided in Mrs. Trerice, and taken measures for the forwarding of correspondence. For the time being they were to be the sport of chance, but their object was still the right one, namely to get into touch with Shaun again at the earliest possible opportunity without placing themselves too far away from Sir Everard. They were as eager to do this as though they had been aware of the full urgency of it. Only, how it was to be achieved was not evident at first.

There were two places where they could hope to hear news of visitors at the King's Arms at Camelford, namely Tintagel and Boscastle. The drivers of the brakes which met daily at Camelford Station would be safe to gossip, they thought, and if they themselves took up their quarters at a big hotel under an assumed name it would be surely possible to find out when Sir Everard left. If he left before they heard from Shaun they were quite determined to go at once to town. An address was the essential meanwhile, not too distant from Camelford, and although they racked their brains, with the map spread out before them, nowhere appeared more suitable than the two seaside places. The little fishing town of Port

Isaac, which both of them longed to see (it is one of the loveliest things in all Cornwall) was too distant from Camelford; St. Breward and St. Teath were so small that they would be the only visitors and would be detected immediately by the first inquirer. At Tintagel or Boscastle they would not be altogether secure, for Cynthia was not in the habit of being overlooked when she stayed at an hotel. She was usually the most stared at, admired, and criticised person there, however quietly she might dress herself; which was one of the reasons why she disliked hotels. She could not flatter herself that her manner had entirely ceased to be bridal; she was too sensible to think that they would not be recognised by the observant to be on their honeymoon tour. But at the big caravanserais that are springing up all along the Cornish coast honeymoon couples are an everyday sight, and Cynthia was of the opinion that this time she might not excite attention. She would not dress for dinner, would be nobody, arriving as she did without a retinue, without a fashionably dressed mother and smart maid. Moreover, she argued, there were such a lot of nice-looking girls in the world that Sir Everard could not possibly be sure that one with a totally unknown name belonged to him.

Peter revolved this with an air of doubt. . . . "You aren't exactly nice-looking," he objected, at length. "Especially after three weeks of the moor." He added, "Though I didn't think that possible."

Cynthia did not profess misunderstanding. It was not her way. Besides, though an unself-conscious girl, she was perfectly well aware that her looks had improved, and she followed his confused thoughts clearly. "If I'm beautiful," she said—"and pretty people are often much more striking——"

"They aren't more striking now," interrupted Peter, and this time he spoke decisively.

"It doesn't make much difference," said the girl, colouring with happiness. "We must take some risks whatever we do."

"Unless we went straight back to London."

"That's been ruled out," said she, rather regretfully. Indeed, it was Peter who had ruled it out.

"Yes, I suppose we can't do that. Tintagel's no good, don't you think, Starry?"

Cynthia was wistful. "If only Mother were here with him!" she said. "It would be such a good sign, too. What did you say, Peterest? Oh! I agree. They are sure to search Tintagel. I daresay Daddy is there now." Alan was, while Sir Everard peacefully fished the Camel. After his second expedition to Radgells—fruitless save for the capture of Shaun's telegram—Sir Everard felt that he owed himself a few days' fishing, and also he wished to regain his self-control. He had been very angry that morning.

"Boscastle has it, then, and I'm jolly glad, for if you remember somehow we never got there the year before last; at least you didn't while I was down. It must be eighteen miles from here, and I don't want you to get over-tired; what do you say to driving from Altarnun?"

"Thank you. Let's. And could we have tea at Altarnun?"

"We shall need it, dear. Altarnun is six miles away across the moor. Can you manage that?"

"Rather!" said Cynthia, who had plenty of courage and never gave up. She was equal to five and twenty miles without undue fatigue on a day when she had no anxieties. "I'm glad I'm not in white to-day. By the map I see we shall have to go straight."

'Going straight' meant crossing the brooks by jumping or by wading. Cynthia, who had dressed herself in freshest green, the cool tint of young leaves in May, was secretly anxious lest she should reach Boscastle untidy.

"I'll take care of you!" said Peter, who was gaining more insight into the feminine mind every day and had already made surprising progress. And he did, for he carried her over.

. . . . . .

The only conveyance to be obtained on that occasion in Altarnun was an ancient and dilapidated jingle, in

which they sat like people half buried in a deep tub: harnessed to it was a very fiery and stalwart pony, of a bright roan colour. Cynthia elected to drive until the spirit was out of this animal; then she handed over the reins to the small boy who had been sent to bring the vehicle home. She was tired, although outwardly she had not turned a hair, and was not sorry to lean back and lose herself in daydreams.

Now Peter found the urchin's remarks difficult to understand, for like many Cornish people north of the moor he spoke a dialect similar to that of Devonshire. Therefore conversation between them languished. He thought that the boy knew his way, and that was enough. So neither he nor Cynthia noticed how three times they turned to the left, at Grigg's Down, where the Boscastle road branches from the road to Camelford, then at Crossways where the first error might have been retrieved, and finally at Collan's Cross, from which a side lane turns towards Slaughter Bridge and the scene of Arthur's last battle. The evening air was hot and still and the road was dusty. All unconscious, the fugitives were being borne at a quiet pace towards Camelford which they most wished to avoid, at the very time when the postman was walking about that little market town with a letter in his pouch from Shaun James to Sir Everard Bremner, of the existence of which they were as unsuspicious as they were of the direction in which they were bound. And the key to the contents of that letter lay in a telegram in Sir Everard's possession and a note which would not be delivered at Radgells until the morrow, wherein Shaun had slightly amplified the astonishing news contained in his wire. Their danger of capture was almost as great as at Dozmary, and the result would probably be as fatal unless Sir Everard had time to digest Shaun's confession properly before they arrived—even then it must be full of doubt.

As they jogged down the hill into Camelford, Sir Everard was slitting open the envelope with his penknife, seated in the lounge of the King's Arms, which looks pleasantly over the tops of trees across the deep,

green valley through which the Camel flows; and rooks were exchanging their opinions in the elms and a thrush was singing sweetly shrill in the garden below the window. He heard at this moment the distant music of a band break out amidst cheering, and thought little of it; but the outburst had startled the occupants of the jingle from their dreams. It came from the neighbourhood of the bridge, immediately in front of them, and there beyond was the familiar street leading up the hill, past the front of the King's Arms, and as far as they could see the paths were lined with people.

"Stop!" cried Peter, so commandingly that the boy drew rein with a jerk and the roan pony started sideways, its hind hoofs slithering on the hard, steep road. "What on earth are we doing here?"

"And what's happening here?" asked Cynthia, too tired to be much alarmed or even surprised, but noticing the crowd.

The urchin said, " 'Tes Camelford, not much out of our way, mister. Father gave me something for a gentleman as lives at the top of the town. 'Tes money, madam, that he didn't like for to put in the post. And he said as how you wouldn't mind payin' a bit extra, though I warn't to press for it, like; seein' as they was dancing the Furry Dance in Camelford to-night."

"Of course, that's the Flora Dance music!" said Cynthia. "I've heard it at Helston. Oh, Peter, what shall we do now?"

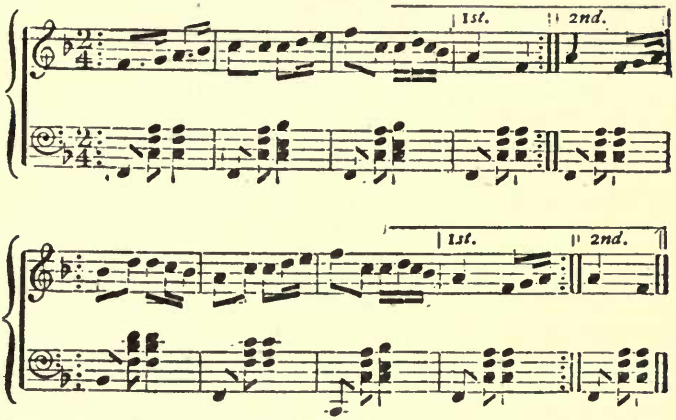
"I've a good mind to pay your father with my walking stick across his back," cried Peter in a fury. "You'd better turn at once."

"Quicker way be to goo aun now, zur!" lied the boy, relapsing into broad dialect as a refuge. "Didn't knaw you was in zuch a 'urry, zur!"

Peter pulled himself up. Could he afford to arouse the kid's curiosity? No, he could not. Besides, the boy would drive back through Camelford and have as long as he pleased for gossip.

"Sorry!" he said shortly. "Get on then, as you're here; but I wanted to reach Boscastle by dinner time."

Cynthia crouched low as they fell in at the tail of the procession, which stretched up the long street, steadily progressing under a thin cloud of dust raised by the feet of the jigging dancers. First, there marched the band, blaring lustily the Furry Tune, above all other the best to set the legs in motion up a long, stiff hill;



then came the strongest of the lads and maidens stepping it, and a line of children all in white twirling and shuffling, and grown-ups next with a bright Temperance banner and proud to carry it, while behind a few carts brought up the rear, moving slowly, blocked in the narrow street by the crowd of shouting people that pressed on the footsteps of the dancers. For even the banner-bearers were tripping to and fro in time, and every moment more onlookers ran ahead and joined in, or shot out of the houses with laughter, pursued by chaff from the elders, while only a few fell from the ranks to lean panting against the nearest window-sill, so that the throng ahead was continually augmenting and progress grew slower and slower till the jingle was forced to stop, which happened in sight of the King's Arms. They saw Sir Everard in the doorway with something white in his hand. They could not take their eyes off him and the proprietress, respectful and respect-

able in black silk, and then the jingle gave a jerk beneath them and they were moving forward again; and in the hearts of neither there was fear, but Cynthia had a yearning towards her father and at the same moment she was wishing she could get out and dance. And Peter squared his shoulders and threw back his head. So they passed by, it seemed under his very gaze, but unseen, and breathed deeply like swimmers emerging from a dive, as they moved out of sight and danger. They felt a sensation of coming back to life.

XV

By the time they reached Boscastle it was past the hour for telegraphing, and fatigue and over-excitement led them to commit another mistake. They wrote to Shaun, and posted the letter with relief, when they ought to have made provision for the despatch of a telegram in the morning as soon as the office opened, which they could easily have done from the Wellington Hotel. The letter that they had sent could not arrive till the following evening at the earliest, and the clear day thus gained for holiday and peace might cost them much.

After a late breakfast, they wandered out along the cut, with cottages on either side, down which the brook ran to the winding gash between cliffs called the Harbour. High downs rose from directly behind the houses to the tower-topped summit of Willapark on their left hand and Penally on their right, while at their back was Forrabury Hill, up which the road mounted past the hotel out of sight to the long, steep street of Boscastle village. They kept to the left bank of the stream, and passed the old Quay sheltered from sea winds, and climbed until they could look down upon the bend of the Harbour, where the water lay black and deep at the foot of the rocks below them, and across was a high, grim breakwater, like the beginning of a wall built from the opposite cliff. Beyond them was the mouth of the gulf, opening narrowly to the Atlantic Ocean between precipices. In this winding gully there was a great depth of water immediately off the rocks, but ships could only come in by warping, and then could only reach the Quay itself on the top of the tide. Moreover the place would be a death-trap in a swell or with a westerly wind

blowing. The cliff on the right-hand side of its entrance was edged fantastically and showed a dark outline against blue sky, while to the left in the far loftier headland of Willapark was a great chasm into which the sea boiled and murmured incessantly. And for ever the foam rippled white and clinging around the Meachard Rock outside, where the gulls shrieked and circled. They stood a long time watching.

And now appeared a middle-aged German gentleman, towel-laden, who showed them steps down the cliff to a cleverly hidden dressing shed, and a tiny bath, hollowed from the rock, and a place where bolder swimmers might dive into the waters of the harbour. The rock basin was green and cool and limpid, a pool for merbabies to play in, and the lapping waters of the harbour lay black and threatening between dark cliffs. The German, who was of a military aspect, skilled in all knowledge of the coast of Cornwall, said that no one came here at this time but himself and in half an hour he would be gone, so they sauntered back to the hotel and changed into bathing clothes and Cynthia borrowed a cloak from the chambermaid, who brought also many towels. For the sea was irresistible and the sun was blazing overhead with obdurate wrath from a sky of brassy splendour.

Now Cynthia after daring climbing, clever with bare feet and white arms grasping and gradual ascent to a ledge up high, showed herself a bold and graceful diver. She was not an acrobat, that is to say she dived straightforwardly, shooting headforemost without somersaults; but while she lamented their absence and invoked the memory of the Lady of Fowey, Peter was glad not to see his Cynthia turning head over heels, which seemed to him not wholly a proper or suitable thing for a lady to do. Although he performed the feat himself without conscious loss of dignity.

When they reached the top of the steps again, she cloaked for the return journey, he in coat and trousers as he had come, they found the anxious German standing guard for them: he was telling a youth that he must not go down yet for there was a lady bathing below.

Cynthia blushed at the narrowness of her escape and thanked them both with confusion and hurried on. So the German waved his straw hat in the air, for he was a courteous individual, and Peter pulled at a wet forelock with a friendly grin and they never saw each other again, although they came close. It was not Peter's bayonet which struck him down. . . .

In the afternoon the Middletons walked a little way up the beautiful Valency valley, and on their return they were standing looking from the main entrance of the hotel towards the bridge when they suddenly became aware of a familiar form moving away from them. "Alan!" cried Cynthia to Peter, and "Alan!" repeated Peter with the most absolute surprise. It was she who drew him back into safety. Somehow happiness seemed to have blunted Peter's wits and Cynthia felt the same about her own, only hers had chanced to be the quicker this time. She would never have admitted that she was usually the readier of the two.

"He would have noticed us if it hadn't been for the coach," she said excitedly. "He must have been watching the coach just as we were!" She ran out and ascertained that Alan was crossing the bridge, and darted back into the porch. "Oh, Peter! What an escape! What shall we do?"

"Why didn't he see us come up?"

"We didn't see him; why should he see us? It was just accident. But, Peter, Peter, let's do something! What shall we do? He's gone over the bridge."

"We'll go the way he came." So up the hill they started, at racing pace, without clear idea of what they were going to do with themselves all the afternoon or how they were to get back to the hotel. Presently they found themselves opposite an old man who had been working at the side of the road. The old man stood up straight and looked at them out of piercing blue eyes; he was tall and broad with a great handsome head, jutting chin fringed with white beard, a firm mouth, a wise forehead above his bright, shrewd eyes; and his look made two friends for him. Cynthia

recognised his face, which was not one that would easily be forgotten—no doubt he had served as model to many a painter. "Aren't you a sailor?" she asked, involuntarily. "Haven't I seen your picture in the Academy?"

He answered in a strong, free voice: "I'm a sailor when there's work for seamen down along, but the harbour is not what it was. I've a message for ye, miss."

"From whom?" His eyes were intent upon her face; kind and admiring, in an old man's way towards young beauty.

"From the Lord, miss. It was given to me as I saw ye breasting the steep slope of the hill like a wild thing hunted. Ye may run a bra' distance afore ye leave trouble behind, but the Lord said to me, 'John Penolver, trouble that ye set out to face with prayer will flee like the rainbow-foot. 'Tes farther away nor a man can tell.' Go back to it, missy. Anger couldn't never stand against that look o' yourn."

"Thank you, John Penolver," she said gently, and passed on.

They walked to the head of the long street of white cottages with bright bits of garden in front; because of the steepness of the road the gutters were made wide and deep on either hand and slabs of slate formed bridges to the gates of the dwellings; and then they turned and went downhill to face Alan. As they passed the old man he waved a greeting and cried to Peter, "Take fisties to 'un!" The jolly call told them that the Spirit had departed.

"Talking to Alan needn't compromise Shaun!" said Peter, though he might have known that it would be bound to do so. They had crossed the bridge and were hesitating whether to turn to the sea or the Valency valley. Cynthia started. She had forgotten Shaun, and here was actually Alan ahead, appearing from the footpath to the valley. He waved to them and stopped.

"Where might you spring from?" inquired Cynthia, airily, as they came up. She would have died sooner than reveal her trepidation to this enemy brother.

"I come from Tintagel, Sissy," said Alan, in a tone that betrayed equally little. He barely nodded to Peter. "And I'm leaving for the East to-morrow. Let's turn back along this path. It's quiet."

"What do you mean by the East?" she demanded, puzzled and watchful.

"Tokyo. I believe it's a very pleasant Legation, and plenty of opportunities if one's good at languages."

"Why, Alan!"

"You are looking very well, Sis, but you haven't grown quick-witted! You knew I was expecting an attaché-ship."

"I didn't know you were going right off like this! Shaun hasn't said a word about it!"

"Shaun!" said Alan, with bitterness: "you've given it away, Sis, haven't you? Not that I ever believed in the fellow. I always knew he was a lying hound from the first moment I set eyes on him."

Peter, who was walking on the other side of Cynthia, interfered before she could speak, and it was well, for she would have answered hotly. "He's a friend of ours. You won't make matters better by abusing him, Alan."

"It's difficult to describe what you've done without appearing to abuse. Can you deny that James is a liar? Can you deny that he has been treacherous to us from the first? You've just admitted, Sis, that he has known your address and been in communication with you. I suspected it after the first five days and set to work on my own account. And here I am, using up my last days at home in search of my only sister who's made a runaway match of it! I haven't seen Dad since yesterday morning. I've just time to drive over to Camelford to-night and motor to Plymouth and catch the mail, and I shall have an hour with Mother to-morrow——"

"How is Mummy?" interrupted Cynthia.

"No thanks to you, she is well. Hadn't your go-between told you? Haven't you bothered to inquire? That fellow has bewitched you, Rose. You aren't yourself——"

"Shut up!" interposed Peter again. "Don't speak to her in that tone."

"I will not shut up! I will speak to her as I please and as she deserves. Nelly told me what to think of you, Middleton. She told me there was nothing in you. She told me——"

"Peter! Don't hit him," cried Cynthia, dismayed. She forced herself between the two men and pushed them both off with more strength than she had imagined she possessed. They stood glaring.

"I lose my chance of saying goodbye to Nelly through you!" said Alan.

"Who's Nelly, then?" demanded Cynthia.

"You've never heard of Helen Taliesin? My Nelly! I asked her fifty times to marry me and she wouldn't because she would have injured my career. She's a straight girl! She would not go back on what she believed or be silent about her opinions, and she knew that as my wife she would have stood in my way. I offered to give up my work; but no, she wouldn't take that sacrifice. She knew that I loved my work. She gave me up. And I gave her up. Dad and Mum asked her to Tintagel last year in order to see if they couldn't patch it together somehow, they respected her so much. There's nothing underhand about Nell." He stood, breathing heavily, looking at the ground.

"Don't sneer at me!" exclaimed Cynthia. "You've been underhand enough! Why did you not tell me all that at the time?"

"Was it your business?" retorted Alan, coldly, looking at her. "You were only a child last year."

"I'm glad you recognise I'm not a child any longer. You've never trusted me, any of you, never given me your confidence nor deserved any of mine. That's been the trouble always, always! But I'm sorry about Helen Taliesin, Alan! I should have liked her for a sister. I'm sorry for you, frightfully . . . dear old Alan."

"I've been sorry for you now and then," admitted Alan. "I suppose you're all right, Middleton. Only

you choose your friends badly. That hypocritical, grinning fool——"

"You shan't abuse Shaun!"

"I lose patience when I think of him, Rose. You don't know how he has played with us this last fortnight. It makes one talk like a literary chap oneself and say he's been your evil genius from the first! I believe it would have been all right about your marriage even, without his interference. All of us understood about the Great Company. You see Dad and I never liked that fellow, Man, and I must say James explained it very well, and then I got hold of one of your chaps, Middleton, a fellow called Mulholland—very decent sort—and he threw a great deal of light on it, but my gad! your running away and staying away,—Thank the Lord, it was all James's doing!"

"Then you are friendly now?" said Cynthia impulsively, with a light in her eyes.

"If you'd spoken sweetly like that to me a year ago, Sis, could I have resisted you? Thank you for your admission that it *was* all James's doing."

"It's a good job you are going to be a diplomatist!" exclaimed Peter, angered. "You are about cut out for it!"

"Come now, brother-in-law, don't bear malice! Shake hands, Peter Middleton; and let's make the best of it and keep our own opinions. Only you must make it up with Dad yourselves. I'll not say a word for you, except on the score of your looks, Rose. You are a rose softly blooming, and no mistake. Marriage agrees with you." Alan glanced at his watch. "I must go back. My car's ordered. I think I was lucky to have run across you. Confound that fellow's knavish tricks. How he's made me waste this last fortnight!"

"We'll walk back with you," offered Cynthia.

"No, you don't! We'll part while I feel comparatively good-natured. I suppose you won't be here tomorrow?"

"We may not," Peter answered cautiously, in reply to a glance from Cynthia.

"Ah! I'll tell the Dad. He'll probably stay a few days more at Camelford, as they tell me fishing's to be had. It's one to me that I've found you. I swore you were at Tintagel!"

"What did your detectives swear?" she slyly asked.

"I wonder what you mean!" remarked Alan. "However there's no leisure to inquire now." He took their right hands, swung them together and shook them heartily. "Be good!" cried Alan Bremner, and walked swiftly away.

XVI

SHAUN'S long silence during their moorland days at Radgells had induced more irritation than they had ever talked out. He had intended it to do so. Their strict duty to him was to remain where they were until they had heard from him. This could be in the morning, for the letter they had written describing the meeting with Alan had caught the post from Boscastle and Shaun might wire in answer to it. In any case they were expecting a letter to arrive from him next day. But they felt a strong impulse to end the suspense by seeking out Sir Everard.

All Cynthia's loyalty could not prevent her feeling deeply hurt because she had not been told of Alan's appointment abroad. She was compelled to blame her father as well as Shaun, for he could easily have announced the news in the Agony Column of *The Times*. And she puzzled over his silence. Later in the evening the true solution occurred to her. Sir Everard had received and dismissed Shaun's suggestion as to the use of an advertisement at a time when he still believed in his good faith; and had forgotten it before the date when the appointment, which must have been sudden, had become known to him. Sir Everard was therefore cleared. She did not think it possible, however, that Alan's approaching departure had been concealed from Shaun.

After dinner they talked to a charming Boston lady who was staying at the hotel. Like most Americans she was very willing to converse, and like most inhabitants of Boston, especially those who are feminine and highly educated, she was ready and able to discuss abstract questions. Peter and Cynthia were young peo-

ple who resembled others of their age in that they enjoyed talking about themselves, but they did this in a manner that was discreet, so that the lady was unable to offer them counsel. But she said one thing which stuck in their minds, partly because she seemed kind and sagacious and partly because it had a sibylline ring. "I guess if I had two courses open to me, about which I was hesitating, I'd surely choose the simpler!" It would be simpler far to go straight to Sir Everard to-morrow.

They lay awake all night and tossed, considering it.

XVII

"Father will leave the house by ten," declared Cynthia, and she slipped out of her shoes and threw off her cloak as she did so. "Ough! The water looks cold. Peter, can't you warm it for me?" She tiptoed down the steps to a ledge beneath which the deep, green water swirled and broke occasionally into white lapping waves upon the dark rock, for the tide was flowing into the cleft between the grim cliffs, and bathing was no longer safe there for any but strong swimmers. These two were safe enough.

"The sun's been shining ever since five o'clock!" said Peter, indignantly. He was wrestling with a knot in his bootlace.

"It doesn't shine in here," said Cynthia. Her body curved over the water and her small, bare feet gripped the rock, while her knees were already bending for the leap. She straightened herself, dropping her arms, and expanded her chest, gliding naturally from one graceful attitude into the other. With raised elbows, her hands became busy above her slender neck where the great ropes of hair were coiled. Her hair shone like the polished kernel of a horse-chestnut of the richest brown. There seemed red lights in it as well as gold, and the skin of her neck and shoulders was milk-white above the dark-blue of her swimming-suit. She turned her head, and said, "We must start at—oh, whenever the 'bus for the 9.15 goes, because we must not reach Daddy dusty and hot. I mayn't have time to dry my hair properly!"

"That can't be helped," said Peter, who was now ready.

Again she bent forward for the dive. "It's a serious matter!" she said, glancing over her shoulder. "I ought to look my best for him and he likes people unruffled. I shouldn't swim, I suppose, or else we should start later! But we must catch him before he sets out to fish!" With a light spring her heels flew up and down she shot headlong. The sound of a clean splash came from below and, as Peter stepped to the edge, her head rose, and a white arm above it, outstretched gleaming, dripping, struck boldly, and he saw her legs come together in a noble kick. As she sped away her clear voice came ringing. "Oh, it's cold, cold as it looked, but lovely! Is that settled, Peter? The 'bus?"

"Yes," he called as he plunged. And that was how they missed Shaun's telegram.

. . . . . .

The King's Arms at Camelford had a flat front and was placed some way back from the street so that vehicles could wait conveniently before the door. They were both of them terrified when they came with suddenness upon it, down the sloping, narrow street in hot sunshine. Cynthia in spite of her fears looked a picture of cool self-possession, while Peter was dogged. Although she was without a maid and had bathed that morning the girl had contrived to get back what Shaun used to describe as "that wonderful bandbox air." They stood in the open doorway for a moment before anyone came, and Cynthia whispered with a smile, "I'm just realising we've never heard from Shaun and are going against what he said. Oh, I can remember all my follies and sins now from childhood up!" He saw that her beautiful grey eyes were filling with tears and his own face must have softened, because she sighed "My dear! My dear!" and turned away. Then he heard her say in her natural voice, "Will you take this note to Sir Everard Bremner, if he is in the hotel. . . . Yes, we will wait. . . . Thank you, we will stay here." She had spoken in her usual self-possessed voice of silver clearness, with the manner of London again, as it seemed to Peter. A momentary vision of the house in Portman

Square came to him from very long ago, from the ages of memory. . . .

Cynthia had written, *Dear Father, we have come to ask forgiveness,* and had signed herself *Cynthia Middleton.* She had not dared to put *Polly,* or *Your Polly,* or else her pride had forbidden her; while she waited she was wondering what that pride had been which now appeared so far away. She wished she had written Polly. She longed for her father, longed to be his child, Polly.

She was in front of Peter, who was looking at the wall. He heard the maid approach and say, "Sir Everard asks you to wait a few moments for him in the drawing-room, ma'am." He was following Cynthia along a corridor, as he had not often followed her, during their out-of-door courtship and marriage; the sensation was rather strange, and now she turned sharply to the left and for an instant he caught sight of her profile under the brim of her Panama hat. They were going upstairs. She out-distanced him with light agility, and the maid was running ahead, eager to get back to her work. How daintily was she shod, this wife of his! what slim ankles in the brown silk stockings! He remembered that in mounting a 'bus she never kicked up her skirt as most girls do. He remembered her bare, symmetrical limbs as she stood ready to dive. She was of beautiful symmetry from head to foot, a joy to his artist's eyes. He rose above her, as they came to a landing, which they crossed to enter a large, quiet room.

He had a dim impression of saddlebag sofas and big chairs and pictures that he did not care for, and then the door closed and they were alone. She fluttered to him and caught his hands and held them to her heart, which was throbbing. Her eyes were deep and frightened. Neither of them spoke, for what was there to say? But their nearness was comforting.

Minutes passed, which seemed hours. Cynthia released his hands and moved away, facing the door, tense and upright. Another minute went, in deadly silence. Peter heard a step in the passage and saw her start and her

shoulders quiver, then they steadied again as he strode forward to her side, and the door opened.

Sir Everard came in and closed the door behind him smoothly and dexterously. He was dressed in grey tweeds, as a country gentleman might be. His expression, though not unfriendly, showed nothing of his thoughts, and he had an air of authority and an ease in coming forward which conveyed the effect of conscious intention. Cynthia was too terrified to receive any impression at all except that Daddy had on an old suit. She was too terrified to stir or to speak.

Sir Everard shook hands with her and kissed her on the forehead, saying, "Good morning, Rosemary." Then he turned to Peter, who met a piercing glance honestly. His grasp was chill, and his voice a shade colder when he said, "How are you, Middleton?" than when he had addressed his daughter; yet it was neither angry nor unkind—merely non-committal.

Peter said, "I beg your pardon for running away from you, sir."

"Perhaps you had better sit down," suggested Sir Everard. "There's a chair behind you, Rose. Do not be in too much of a hurry, Middleton. This matter cannot be settled by a simple apology, I fear."

"Daddy!" gulped Cynthia.

"Control yourself, please. I have not refused your husband's apology, and it is not impossible that I may yet see my way to accept it. I wish you both to understand that this interview is in my hands. I will ask questions and you will answer them."

Cynthia's eyes, filled with tears, were fixed on her father's face, imploring him. A weak, little gesture of her hands, her pose implored him; her youth, her grace, her beauty made her intolerably pathetic, and Sir Everard for the first time betrayed uneasiness. He inquired, almost hurriedly, "Are you aware that Mr. James wrote to give me your address at Radgells?"

"No!" said Peter, surprised. "I——"

"You were not aware. Then was your coming here suggested or advised by Mr. James?"

"No."

"I am glad of that!" said Sir Everard, and his tone spoke of a very real relief, and his face brightened. "I am heartily glad of that." Cynthia longed to sob out, "We wanted to come before but Shaun would not let us," and was grateful all her life that she remained loyally silent, for he went on, "I gather with the most profound thankfulnes, Polly, that the words in your little note are true. I could not bear to think that my daughter was tricking me. Mr. James told me in a letter which I received after your departure from Radgells that your elopement was advised and planned by him; he confessed that you had again and again begged him for release from the undertaking you had given to abide by his advice. He said that Middleton had been eager from the beginning to come forward in a straightforward manner and face my anger—which I daresay it is as well you were prevented from doing,—and he acknowledged that you were longing to see your mother and relieve her anxiety. I had not been wholly taken in by Mr. James, and the contents of his letter did not come altogether as a surprise; but I confess I remained somewhat suspicious till yesterday, when I learned from Alan that he had not exaggerated his influence over you both. I'm relieved that you have come of your own accord—heartily thankful, in fact."

"Do forgive me, Daddy!" said Cynthia, and she did precisely what Shaun would have recommended, that is to say she fell on her knees beside her father's chair, clung to him and wept bitterly, sobbing her heart out like a little child.

At first Sir Everard stroked her hair in a feeble sort of way, looking sympathetic and a trifle self-conscious, then he became uneasy, said, "There! There!" tried to raise her and glanced uncomfortably at Peter, who also did the right thing. He picked Cynthia up and let her have her cry out on his shoulder. Forgetting the difference between fathers and lovers, Sir Everard had quite the air of regarding this as a feat of skill and self-sacrifice.

"By the way," he said, seeking an inner pocket, "I have a telegram addressed to you. I obtained it from Mrs. Trerice at Radgells—a very respectable woman, that! Here it is, Middleton. The telegraph boy gave it to her daughter after you had gone. I should have returned it to the Post Office, but I did not do so."

With Cynthia still holding forlornly to the lapels of his coat, shaken by sobs that were becoming less frequent now, Peter deftly took the paper from Sir Everard's outstretched hand and opened the envelope. Shaun's silence was explained, when he read, *do as wish have written him camelford also you wait letter if can going new york.* "Darling, Shaun's going to New York!" he cried, handing the telegram to Sir Everard.

"He told me that," said Sir Everard. He added after he had read it, "James did not say he had written to you, but that does not matter now."

Cynthia was mopping her eyes hard. As soon as she could speak, she said somewhat gaspingly, "Fancy Shaun going away!"

"Let us settle about Mr. James," interrupted Sir Everard, before Peter could reply. "You will not, I imagine, expect me to forgive him for having lied to your Mother and myself during these anxious weeks, nor was I particularly flattered by the cynical alacrity with which in his last letter he offered to give up our acquaintance. But as he is going abroad and as the secrecy of your marriage, Polly, will require to be explained to the world as a Bohemian and romantic freak, it might be just as well for us all to remain at least on speaking terms with him. I'm not urging on you any strong measures, Middleton; you would be wise to keep silent!"

"Won't you call him Peter, Daddy dear?" asked Cynthia, who was still dazed by her collapse, or she would not have made so false a step.

Sir Everard withdrew into himself visibly, and said in a very cold voice, "I have overlooked a great many things. Do not try to make me go too fast. And had you not better sit down now? There is no need for

you still to stand hugging each other, I imagine! At first I thought it a pretty sight, but I confess it is beginning to get a little on my nerves! . . . Thank you, child. As I said a year or so ago I have no objection to your husband—forgive my plainness, Middleton,—except on the score of means. Indeed, as the son of an old friend, a man who was respected by every single person who knew him, I am glad to receive him into my family. We will say nothing about the Great Company, as Mr. Man made such an absolutely ungentlemanly attempt to prejudice your Mother that he put himself out of court with men of honour. I never did like him, nor ever shall. For the rest, we can only hope that Mr. James's high hopes for your career, Middleton, will be fulfilled. You appear to have made a good start. I can allow Rosemary—largely through your brother Alan's generosity—two hundred a year, and that is all. All——"

"Oh, thank you, Daddy!" cried Cynthia, and Peter, too, murmured thanks. Although as a matter of fact well within Sir Everard's means, it was more than they had dreamed of hoping.

"You will have to struggle along as best you may. Now I want to go and fish, and you must catch the afternoon train home, that is, to town, and make your separate peace with your Mother. Don't put up at the Paddington; go somewhere nearer for a night or two. Middleton, will you leave me with my daughter for a few minutes? There's a lounge at the end of the passage." When Peter was gone, he continued, "I'll pay for the hotel, don't worry yourself about that; and to-morrow I'll come home, and we'll talk things over and decide where you are to live, etcetera and so forth!"

"Thank you, Dad!"

"Polly, have I been such a very cruel father? I think you might have had a chat with me before you did anything so rash, don't you?"

"It isn't easy to talk to you," answered Cynthia, hanging her head. "When you don't want to listen, Daddy." He frowned, but he could not be stern with

so picturesque a daughter. She was good to see, and he had not looked on her for three weeks. He felt a sudden thrill of pride.

"Mr. James said I did not allow you enough liberty. Did you think that, too, Polly?"

"Sometimes," she admitted, meeting his gaze, with frank eyes and mutinous brows.

He sighed. "I was very busy at the Office always," he said, meditatively. "I should have told you about your Mother, though, and then this might not have happened. Polly dear, how could you hurt your Mother so? You *saw* that she was ill last year. How could you do what you've done? How had you the heart to do it?"

Cynthia went white. "Mother isn't ill? Is she?"

"No, no, not now. That's all over. But she's not strong, you know. . . . Don't you?"

"Mother kept me away from Peter by being not strong. Daddy, she used it! She took advantage of it. I couldn't do anything against that weapon. I couldn't face her. Really, Daddy. And then there was that rule in the Great Company about not marrying, do you know?"

"Yes, I know."

"And I couldn't do it openly. I was afraid to. I couldn't, Daddy! But I do love you both."

"Do you, Polly?"

"Yes, I do! I do! I do! I've missed you so these weeks—I've been frightfully happy; Peter has been a dear; he's been perfect every second of the time.—But I've missed you so, and wanted so much to be friends, and . . . oh Daddy! I *have* missed you."

"Do we come behind Peter in your heart? The truth!"

She hesitated. "Are you doubtful?" he asked quickly, leaning forward.

"No," she said, with just a little pride. "I'm not that."

He sank back, and was silent for a moment. Then he said, "You underrate your Mother, Polly. It's right

that you should love your Peter more, I'm not disputing that. But you don't know how brave a woman Lina is. My fault, my dear! I wanted to spare you. You thought it was only her nerves wrong at the beginning of the year, but it was more than that. We had reason to believe she was going blind."

His tone forbade doubt. Aghast, Cynthia repeated, "Blind!" remembering all Lady Bremner's fears and how in secret she had despised them. "Poor Mummy!"

"The decay of the optic nerve has ceased. It may not start again. . . . She had lost her long sight before I knew of it. It was going in 1911. It grew worse at Tintagel in 1912. She consulted a specialist and told me what he said—in the December of the same year—and after that it got on her nerves. . . . We often saw the specialist, but there was nothing to be done. You remember she had a bout of influenza and was ill for long—you nursed her well, Polly, you were a good girl. She began to get better after that and even made progress. Now the trouble is stationary. You needn't cry, child. The bad times are over, we hope. But you mustn't underrate your Mother. Alan knew, and we ought to have told you; I can see that, when it's too late! It seemed needless. It appeared to us to be needlessly cruel, since you could do nothing, and you might have been frightened, Polly, though the trouble isn't hereditary. You seemed so young to us, such a child. We didn't realise, I think. I didn't! That James fellow has made some things clear. . . . Some things!" All at once she saw her father as an old man, needing love; and the fear that she had had of him during her whole life vanished as she held out her hands to him impulsively, both hands, which he did not refuse: and again she fell upon her knees by his side, but this time as a daughter, not a penitent.

They were fortunate. They had begun to understand each other before it was too late.

. . . . . .

"The Lady of Fowey *did* save us," chattered Cynthia, when they were in the train after a most affectionate

leave-taking from the Trerice family and a drily cordial one from Sir Everard. "He was in an *awful* mood, that day, at Dozmary! And when he was looking at the Furry Dance he had Shaun's letter in his hand and had had *bad fishing* all the morning—you know it was a fearfully hot day! Everything's for the best, really, even Shaun going to America! He has been queer, hasn't he?"

"I believe he's been devilish self-sacrificing!" said Peter, with unwonted strength of language. "That's what's dawning upon me!"

"Oh, I'm so happy I can't think about it," coaxed Cynthia, nestling to him, for the carriage was empty. "Can you, when I'm here?"

It seemed that he could not.

XVIII

THEY reached their hotel, which was shabby and select and in Mayfair, by eleven o'clock, and after Cynthia had tidied her dress and herself she went straight to Portman Square with a note which Sir Everard had written to Lady Bremner, who had also been prepared by telegram to receive her erring daughter. She had not been gone five minutes when Shaun arrived.

He was exactly the same—straw-coloured hair and acute face and restless hands,—Peter had expected him to look older. "I hope you dislike me a little!" he began, anxiously. "I got your wire of course or I shouldn't be here—I hope you were annoyed with me for not writing. I meant you to think me a bit of an ass, you know; too much in love with intrigue, and inconsiderate of Cynthia's feelings; so that you'd hate me by the time you met Sir Everard. This quaint old spot reminds me of him, by the way. I bet he chose it and I hope to goodness he's paying for it! He probably stayed here thirty years ago while he was moving into Portman Square. You can see they've never touched the furniture since, except with a duster. But it's a good hotel. Even me they received reverentially. and that's a test for a servant, I can assure you, Peter, old thing. Say you love me a little still."

Peter grabbed at his hand again and wrung it.

"Ow!" said Shaun. "The moor has done your muscles good, anyway. I mustn't stop, because I can see with my eyes and have heard with my ears downstairs that your good wife is out, and she may return with your mother-in-law. Peter, you must not ask them to forgive me. They wouldn't be human if they did, except perhaps young Alan, who was most remarkably

outspoken and may be in a forgiving mood! I lied like hell, and was so infernally sympathetic, and my *volte-face* was sudden and complete. Mind you, I wrote Sir Everard a good letter—after fifteen or sixteen rough drafts, for you know I'm a laborious composer,—because he mustn't hate me too much or it would reflect seriously on your judgment. But then he had to *blame* me, had to see that I was responsible, don't you know,—what!"

"Shaun, what makes you queer like this?" cried Peter.

Shaun looked uncomfortable. "You mustn't like me," he said. "Not for some time yet—it wouldn't be at all wise. And I was rather beastly to your good wife. It couldn't be helped, though. First, time and anxiety softened their hard, outer shell, you see; and then, as they still had to hate somebody, I concentrated all of it on myself! There never was such acting as mine! I used to pat myself on the head for hours. But I hope next time you'll remember what an age letters take to come from Cornwall. You evidently never got my first wire. How was that? It did not come back to me."

Peter explained in his clumsy way.

"Surely the telegraph boy deserves the sack!" interrupted Shaun. . . . and then, "Oh, the Trerices! Dear things, aren't they? Then I'll say no more. Now tell your whole story from the beginning. Is that the bedroom? I'll retire there if Lady Bremner comes, for I dare not face her. Be wise. Don't stand up for me *too* much! We shall never be quite the same to each other, I hope, for your sake—you're looking what used to be called 'manly,' old boy, and she is a darling, isn't she? But go on."

"Shaun, must you go to America?" asked Peter.

He glanced away, and said hastily: "Yes, yes, I must. I don't like it, but it's really necessary. I've taken a job over there after my old fashion."

"Journalism! Oh, Shaun, is it money?"

Shaun could always tell a half-truth perfectly and he looked Peter square in the eyes. "Only partly," he said.

"It's my work! Although I can be vigorous enough in journalism, you know what a porcelain style mine is in novel writing, and with what labour I achieve it. I've never been a worshipper of style without matter, of line without mass, and all the rest of it. The truth is that I'm written out, old boy. I've known it for some time, and now seemed the opportunity to break with the stuff that I can't do right. I've burnt the last MS. Between ourselves, this is my punishment for having made love to Cynthia. I deserve anything for having lost my head over a girl half my age. Don't misunderstand me. My work really died with my wife, with my heart; and, in a way, Cynthia was the dream who was keeping me alive; but when the memory of Doris passed, when I was disloyal and thought I cared for Cynthia not as a dream, no longer as a tall, beautiful friend whom I helped, then it was that I recognised a change in the stuff I was turning out. And when Doris came back and the dream had vanished I knew I had always been dead, and, though I feel I'm with her always, I do not feel that I have more work to do, and I see the hopelessness of what I am doing."

"No one else does!" said Peter.

"Yes, they do," Shaun asserted sadly. "Forgive me, but the people who really know have seen."

"Shaun! It will come back."

"In the meantime I'm going to the stuff that I've a facility for. I'm going to grow rich, and buy pictures!"

"Why not stay in England with us? Cynthia will miss you."

Shaun laughed. "A little, perhaps, you dear old fellow. No, I'm off. I'd have left you the flat—I thought of that at first,—only I don't know, it would seem rather a slap in the face to the Bremners, so I've found you another crib,—over a shop in Mayfair,—the refusal of course; I haven't committed you. We'll see it to-morrow, and I'll get you to buy as much of my furniture as you can do with. Cheap, supposing *you* pay; dear, if Sir Everard does, as I daresay he will!

Carry on with that yarn of yours now. We've talked enough about me."

. . . . . .

Until Cynthia was out of the hotel it did not strike her that she should have had an escort, that never before had she been alone in the streets of London at half past eleven at night. The noises around her were bewildering, the hurrying figures appeared to linger in passing her by; and presently, although she only had a little distance to go, she hailed a taxi. Then there was another strangeness; it was odd to sit in darkness and be borne past sudden glaring lights and round breathless corners, without the soft touch of swansdown or of silk on bare shoulders; most singular of all when she drew up in front of the remembered door, to think that she was Rosemary Bremner no longer. And Cynthia Middleton had no purse in her pocket! Annoyed, she ran up the steps and rang the bell.

"Is my mother up? Where is my mother?" She had spoken before glancing at the face of the maid, and now she saw, with a start, that the woman was a stranger.

"Lady Bremner's in the drawing-room, m'm. Will you please to come up?"

"Yes. Please pay the cabman. I have left my purse behind."

"Yes, m'm." The maid was about to precede her, but Cynthia called her back.

"Pay him now, please. I will announce myself." She ran upstairs with a feeling of gladness at her heart and a great joy that home should still be home. She had not forgotten, and it was good to be there. She scarcely knocked at the drawing-room door, but rushed in more like Cynthia Middleton than Rosemary Bremner, calling, "Mummy! Mummy! Are you here?" And Lady Bremner rose, slender and elegant in a black evening dress, from the very chair by the fire from which she had seen Peter's tall form uplift itself ages ago. How young she had been then! Her mother's face was anxious and doubtful, and she looked sad and she did not advance to meet her, but, as Cynthia came forward,

a very sweet look overspread her face, and suddenly she stretched out her arms. . . .

. . . . . .

"Lor' love a duck! Here's Cynthia!" said Shaun. "Lor', but her be a booty! How happy her looks tü, in spite of the tears in her lovely eyen! Her mother has been kind to her, for sure now, and isn't that so, whateffer, mavourneen? I never excelled at dialect. But shall I imitate a kangaroo for you? At moments of great excitement, my kangaroo—one hops solemnly round with dangling paws like this—used to make Doris laugh outrageously. That's the wrong adverb. But you know what I mean!"

"Phyllis is going to be married," said Cynthia, clasping his hands. "Mummy told me, and I've just read it in a scrawl from Joyce. She's engaged to Mr. Philip Adams, whom you two met at the Revel." She had dropped Shaun's hands and gone to Peter. "He's much older than she is, Boy dear, and she declares that he's the only man she has ever met who would promise to let her do exactly as she likes. 'Always the object of That One's yearnings,' says Joycie. Would you believe it, Shaun, she hasn't written to me herself!"

"A poor return for your confidence in her," responded Shaun, gravely. Cynthia smiled.

"Will your mother see me?" Peter wanted to know.

Shaun interrupted. "Discuss it after I'm gone," he said, "which will be in a moment or two. I'm perfectly sure she does not want to see me any more and that's all that concerns Shaun. When you came in, Cynthia, I'd just heard how you missed my telegram on the last day telling you to go to Sir Everard at once. There are some people in the world who are very lucky, children, and you seem to be a pair of them. Witness that blessed aunt of Peter's, besides some diving girl who sounds to me as though she might be the wife of a man called Wyndham Merrion Wyndham, who's a good sort. I was about to remark—which sounds Yankee!—that I must take my leave. Do you often address Peter as 'Boy dear,' Cynthia?"

"Not often," she said, flushing.

"Did you begin it by calling her 'Girl'?" demanded Shaun, turning to Peter.

"I might have." Peter was bewildered.

Cynthia was not. She went to Shaun and stood in front of him, with hanging head. "I *know* I'm not natural!" she said. "I'm a piggish, ungrateful beast to you, Shaun dear." She flung up her chin and met his sad gaze frankly.

"Things change," said Shaun, "which has been noticed before, by the way. No, I won't be flippant. But I asked about 'Boy dear,' because Doris used to call me that!"

"I'm not disloyal at heart," said Cynthia.

"I know you aren't."

"And I ask you to forgive me. I shall find a way to make Mother like you again."

Shaun smiled. "Don't try!" he said.

"I will try, and if I don't succeed—whether I succeed or not—I will never, never give you up."

"I should think not!" said Peter.

She nodded to him, determinedly. "I deserve that!" she said.

"It's a good thing I'm going away," declared Shaun, in a cross voice, "or all my work would be spoiled." But he was pleased. "Night-night! Time you children were in bed. You'll see things less clearly when you grow older and perhaps think worse of Shaun, but you'll always love the fellow a little, both of you?" he added quaintly, "Won't you, dears?"

Peter stepped to Cynthia's side and seized her wrist in his great grip and shook it, and she loved him for the pain he gave, glorying in his forgetfulness of her. "I should think we will!" he cried. "God . . . God forget us, if we forget you!" During the instant that he hesitated, suddenly self-conscious, Shaun whipped up his hat from a chair by the door, nodded, smiling, to them both, and went quietly out.

XIX

Lady Bremner had mentioned Peter by his Christian name, not unkindly, and next day she addressed him by it. "Good morning, Peter! How sunburnt and well you are looking!" Then when the maid had left the room she said, "We need not refer to what is past, but I think we must discuss the future, or at least the immediate future, for which reason I told Rosemary to let you come alone. Please be perfectly frank with me, and tell me where you are thinking of living."

Cynthia had warned him that she could not bear to hear Shaun's name spoken. "A friend has suggested a little flat which he has found over a shop in Mayfair," he said. "Cynthia received the address this morning. It could be made very charming, we are told, and is certainly cheap. We want to live very quietly."

"That would be near," said Lady Bremner, brightening.

"Yes, off Brook Street. It will not take long to get in if we decide on it, for he found the landlord about to decorate and persuaded him to do so in accordance with his own taste. And he has furniture to dispose of himself."

"Your friend seems very capable!" said Lady Bremner. "I hope his furniture would suit dear Rosemary."

"It would cost us almost nothing," said Peter, apologetically.

"Please do not bind yourself, Peter. I expect my husband home to-day, and since Rosemary has chosen to marry without a trousseau, I think he may wish to help with the furnishing."

"Thank you," said Peter. "I can furnish, though. I

have the money. Only it doesn't seem wise to spend much at first."

"I quite agree, and you will not let your pride stand in the way of Rosemary's comfort, I hope."

"You are very kind," he murmured.

"We are very fond of our only daughter, and we certainly wish to make the best of what has happened, since it *has* happened. We do not—that is to say, I do not—greatly blame you for it; after the manner in which I myself have been deceived. It was most clever and most treacherous, and I do not wonder that you two inexperienced young people fell under the same influence."

"Lady Bremner! I ought to say straight out——"

"Please don't! Rosemary tells me you are very good to her, Peter, and I wish to be fond of you. Please let me begin in my own way. You must understand that the person to whom I refer cannot be anything but distasteful to me; and I, for my part, realise that you feel yourselves under many obligations to him. The reason why I have started the question of your home and your intentions in regard to furnishing and all that, is simply that Rosemary's marriage must be announced by us to-day. You surely must see that she placed herself as well as her parents in a difficult position by what she did. Do you feel that?"

"Yes."

"Very well then, Peter. I do not choose to acknowledge to all our acquaintance that she ran away from her father's house and hid herself for weeks from her mother. To do so would harm her, since many people—and they the nicest of her friends—would find what she did inexcusable. I am not discussing whether that would be right or wrong, I am only saying that it is so. It is fair that she, rather than we, should bear the inconvenience of this. Do you not agree?"

"I won't argue it," said Peter.

"The runaway marriage must appear in its true light as a romantic escapade, in which Mr. James bore his part. For this reason we cannot afford to break with him

openly, although in private I shall not pretend friendship, forgiveness, or even toleration. I never mentioned your attachment to Rosemary to anyone, but I shall say now that we were becoming reconciled to it and that you were hoping to be married in another year. We were conscious that you were both getting tired of waiting, and might have consented to an earlier marriage, and were perfectly well informed of what you had done, after it was too late to prevent it. That is true, is it not? You will be blamed for being inconsiderate to us, and this will be the end of it with most people, when they see that we are all on the friendliest of terms."

"I want to do whatever is best for Cynthia," said Peter, adding hastily, "and I do understand how beastly I've been to you!"

"Then it's settled," said Lady Bremner, "and you will both dine with us to-night, I hope?"

"Thank you, I would like very much to dine with you, and I'm sure Cynthia would. For the rest I hate to seem ungracious, but I must really talk over what you say with Cynthia before I give my word."

"Then do so and return to me, Peter. Anyone might meet her!"

In Peter's private opinion it did not become Lady Bremner to condemn the tortuous diplomacy of Shaun, especially since he guessed who had first suggested the line of conduct to her mind. He said as much to Cynthia, who asked, "What does it matter, dear? We'd better let her do it. I shan't see much of all those people now," to which he responded, "I used to think it would be easy to be honest if one had plenty of money!"

"I hate lies, too," said the girl, and compressed her lips. "But these are for Mummy's sake, not for mine."

"You aren't cross with me, darling?"

"Mummy was very sweet to me last night, and I believe she'll be fond of you, and she's frightfully lonely now that Alan is gone. You did say that about honesty rather nastily, Peter! You know you did. People won't

bother about us after the very first, and none of them will ask rude questions."

So Peter capitulated.

The family dinner went off successfully, Sir Everard receiving them as though their presence was a matter of course; and he managed to be cordial when left alone with Peter. Cynthia was discussing Phyllis with her mother and defending the little girl from the charge of having accepted a man twice her age for his money. Not that Phyllis was incapable of this, although she had plenty of her own, but Joyce had given a frank opinion to the effect that she was "really impressed," whatever she might say, and a good deal in awe of him. Mr. Adams was described by Joyce as "a nice old dear and a great hunting man. That One will have to jump five-barred gates when he gets a little less cracked about her." It seemed absurd to Cynthia, the princess who had resigned her prospect of a throne, to speak of a girl who would be so rich as Cousin Phyllis marrying for mercenary reasons. Lady Bremner actually allowed herself to be argued with and talked down.

The two men rejoined the ladies at a fortunate moment, for Cynthia had just become conscious of her unusual boldness and relapsed into silence; moreover, Sir Everard was saying "Peter" as they entered the room. The young man had reminded him of his father, Major Middleton, and when Cynthia saw Daddy gazing at him quite affectionately her heart warmed to her parents. She began to chatter at her gayest, about the flat which she and Peter had inspected in the afternoon; and how, after Mummy had approved, they would take it; and of the dear, winding staircase and the jolly little rooms and the cook who was the sister of the dairyman whose shop was below; and how the kitchen was out of the way downstairs on the ground floor; and how the cook would leave a good place to come and be near her brother, if only he might have his meals in the kitchen. She seemed a thoroughly respectable woman; and so with a young house-parlourmaid they could manage beautifully! (Shaun had investigated the credentials of the cook

and already provided the house-parlourmaid.) Lady Bremner did not know sufficient of the cost of such a ménage to make her hold her hands up in horror, and she regarded two servants as absolutely essential, which Shaun had foreseen. He considered the amiability of the parents and the goodwill of society towards the young people infinitely more important than the saving of capital. Cynthia had amused him by her mingled emotions, as described by Peter, of relief and disappointment when she found out that they were not to starve in a garret, and still more by her joyful exclamation on mounting into the flat, "Oh, but Shaun *dear*, it *is* a garret after all!"

And now as she laughed and talked with her parents, in the peacock-blue evening dress which she had worn at the theatre on the night of their engagement, privations and poverty were far from her mind.

"I've seen that dress before, haven't I?" said Sir Everard. "I like you in those quaint things."

"Liberty's frocks never go out of date," said Cynthia. "Mummy wanted me to have my newest and loveliest so that Marie should not guess that I minded wearing it out for you and Mummy, and I don't; but I wanted this one."

"You want many things now, Rose!" remarked Sir Everard in a severe tone. Lady Bremner chimed in, "It is not very pleasant, your being obliged to fetch your clothes in this way."

The atmosphere of the room instantly changed. Poor Cynthia's lower lip trembled and she said meekly, "I knew you liked it, Daddy, and Peter does, too."

"Can we depend on Marie?" Sir Everard inquired of his wife. "I confess I had forgotten her."

"Oh yes, Everard. She's devoted to us."

"I've been admiring some of your work to-day," said Sir Everard, turning to Peter. "I'm glad to see that you exercise your satire on behalf of the Unionist cause."

"I'm thankful I get the chance to, sir," said Peter.

Immediately Cynthia bubbled over with the mirthful and exciting story of the meeting with the painter, whose

name, which she did not reveal at first, commanded instant unwavering attention. Peter tried to stop her, being convinced that Shaun's silence on this subject had an unsatisfactory meaning, either that he suspected a hoax or perhaps that the Great Man was notoriously fickle, but Cynthia would not be silenced, nor did Sir Everard appear to doubt; on the contrary, he uttered a few simple words of congratulation. After this, Cynthia was irrepressible. She was in wild spirits, and carried everything before her, playing and singing, leaning over Daddy to stroke his moustache, even kissing her mother in public. She was not to be recognised as the quiet Rosemary of her parents' recollections, which made the parting easier when the time came. Not that her laughter and merriment displeased them, but because they were unfamiliar.

XX

JULY was beginning when Peter and Cynthia went forth to furnish, sometimes accompanied by Lady Bremner; less frequently by Shaun, who was busy making his own arrangements for departure. He was taking his pictures, his books and his writing-table, and the chair in which Doris used to sit; his kitchen gear he gave to Peter. The rest of his well-worn furniture he gave to his landlady in the shop below. It had fulfilled his purpose, served him well, and extracted a cheque from Sir Everard in order that Rosemary should not be reminded of 'that person.'

His mother's annuity had died with her, and the sale of her goods had provided for her old servant Martha, as she had directed. Shaun had been living to a great extent on his savings during the last few years, which had been almost barren of work—or rather of achievement. He was positively compelled to return to journalism. A few months ago he might have arranged to husband his resources until he could accumulate a sufficiency of reviewing to keep him alive in London, but he had been reckless and now that was impossible: since, therefore, he must return to indiscriminate writing, he preferred to do so in another country. Also he was not sorry to leave Cynthia to her parents, for the responsibility of separating her from them had weighed heavily on his mind through several sleepless nights and more than one anxious day, and the complete success of his manœuvring had not come altogether without surprise. He felt it would be tempting Providence to remain longer on the scene, as undoubtedly his presence constituted a danger to her peace of mind. For this reason he hastened the departure already decided upon and resolved to sail before the appointment he had accepted

was actually vacant, so soon in fact as he had introduced Peter to the men it was necessary he should meet.

They spent two whole days together, making a grand tour of editors, and Peter discovered that to be son-in-law to a knight and to own an address in Mayfair did not make him less interesting in their eyes. He was amused by the artfulness with which Shaun brought forward the information, but—as the latter was glad to observe—mingled with his amusement was even more annoyance than he would have felt before he went away. Evidently the influence of Cynthia had been for good. Peter's protest, "I say, Shaun, you wouldn't do that for yourself, you know," having been met by a cool, "Certainly not," there seemed nothing more to be said, and the round was marked by the repetition of the incident in every office. By the end, however, Peter had collected orders for over thirty pounds worth of work.

"That's the way to success, my young one!" said Shaun. "First, good stuff with technical skill behind it; second, a market unspoiled by immature efforts; third, an old hand to introduce you; fourth, a pleasant manner of your own; fifth, the discovery of relatives of position and an address in Mayfair. Keep your head screwed on, and you can't fail. Here are a few rules.

"*Always* send in ordered stuff long before the last moment.

"Never call at a publishing office except on business.

"Never talk politics or professional matters in public. Don't tell your prices. Don't discuss people.

"I've never talked to you about your landscape work, Peter; and I suppose that's why you haven't cross-questioned me concerning the Great Man you wrote about. He is genuine. I mean the incident is characteristic. I do not doubt that he will do as he promised. I certainly do not doubt his judgment and I am sure now—probably far surer than you have dared to be—that you must have an unusual gift for such work. I expect he was struck by your drawing, as I was, but you must have colour and an instinctive feeling for com-

position and a lot behind that, to have made him say what he did! If you had independent means and unlimited time before you, old boy, I'd throw up my hat for you, and as it is you'd be mad to neglect the opportunity; but for God's sake, or rather for Cynthia's, don't give up this connection I've made for you! In no circumstances give journalism the go-by."

He paused, and Peter asked why.

"Because you aren't the man to watch your wife losing her youth through poverty, without doing bad work in consequence. You're a conventional kind of a kid, Peter, not an artist in temperament at all; you'd always put Cynthia before your work. Oh, I don't want it otherwise! No one who really knows could ever wish any one they loved to be an artist. How can they? You don't know the sufferings, mental and physical, which it entails on a poor man. I want you to be a successful journalist. Why, hang it all, if you develop the sensitive side of yourself—— Don't do it! You make yourself liable to all sorts of imaginative possessions. An author's got to be in love with his heroine if he wants to make the reader feel her charm. And there are far more difficult things . . . darker things . . . I tell you, man, to be an artist you've got to suffer, suffer, suffer, and God will see that you do, if there's the true stuff in you, and I don't want that for you and Cynthia."

"But, Shaun, isn't a painter different?"

"An artist of any kind has got to leave his wife and cleave to his work. Or he'll be torn asunder between the two." Shaun suddenly became conscious that he was being unfaithful to the truth which was in him, and the face of Doris rose before him, mutely reproachful. "Didn't I love to give myself?" her great eyes seemed to ask. . . . He changed the subject with abruptness.

"The best liars are kind-hearted, honest people," he said, "like me. What does Sir Everard say?"

"About you? Not much, but I believe he thinks you very clever."

Shaun laughed. "He ought to, although I misjudged his wife! I undervalued Lady Bremner; there's more

pluck and self-restraint in the family than I thought. So much the better, Peter. Cynthia will need all she's inherited if you become a painter."

"Shaun, I promise not to be a fool, at least I'll try all I know not to be."

"That's right. How do you get on with Lady B.?"

"I like her again."

"Yes, and you won't try to be too fond of her now, which is the usual mistake of children-in-law. Well, Peter, I'm off in a week!"

The home was complete in that time, in spite of a day's interference, miscalled aid, from Phyllis, who, however, consented to forgive darling Rosie her secrecy in regard to her wedding. Lady Bremner, although afraid of Phyllis's indiscretion, would not make a direct appeal to her to assist the account which was already in circulation, and it was left to Cynthia to explain; but That One was so wrapped up in her own affiairs that she had almost forgotten that Rosie's engagement was ever under a cloud. She had not often been at the Bremners' during the last year. The only other possible sources of danger were Laurence Man and Helen Taliesin. The first indeed might be disregarded, as he was known to be an unsuccessful suitor, and was besides not the kind of man to take social risks in order to gratify private malice; but Helen's honest bluntness might have been more dangerous, had she been in the way of going much into society. As it was, there was little to be feared. There would have been nothing had Alan been in correspondence with her, which Lady Bremner thought was not the case.

Shaun declined to be seen off from Euston; as a compromise he consented to be their first guest at dinner the night before. Cynthia wore her prettiest, freshest dinner dress, a dear white clinging one with loose white sleeves, very simple and very lovely, suiting her refined beauty to perfection, and what a hostess the girl made! "You'll be Peter's fortune," he told her.

"I want to be that," she replied. "Shaun, you are kind to me!" How bright her eyes were! How vivid the delicate pink of her cheeks and the richer scarlet of

her lips and the glory of her hair. She was a resplendent picture to-night of what an English lady can be with youth and happiness after a holiday in the open air. "Would people care for a very plain dinner like this? People who could help him? Dare I ask them? That's what I want to know."

"The dinner suits the flat. It's artistic and it's simple. I see one or two things in the room on the conventional side, which you don't want insisted on,—but I suppose they are gifts." Cynthia exchanged glances with Peter. "Should they remain, I'd introduce a deliberately decorative element into your dressing, Cynthia, when you entertain at home; for the sake of balance. But the dinner's perfect. May I ask, is it impertinent, but did the wine come from Portman Square?" She nodded. "I'm relieved. It's too good for your income, my dears. Oh, in that case, persevere and prosper!"

It was early in July, and all eyes were then directed towards Ireland. Inevitably the conversation turned to politics, and Shaun said, "I hear ancestral voices prophesying war. The thin voices of Chatham, Burke and Pitt come to me faintly across the tumult of the passionate outcries of the living. I suppose it's Civil War that I hear approaching, rumbling with screams and clangour down the avenue of Time. The echo of cannon and the smell of slaughter are in the air. Peter, don't get drawn in! And remember that Home Rule must come, for the Radicals are pledged too deeply to withdraw! Don't oppose bitterly, and don't be flippant in your work. If your insight is kind as well as wise, some day you will get on the staff of *Punch*, and then you will be able to paint four days out of seven."

"I'm not wise!" said Peter, astonished.

"You're simple enough to be wise!" said Shaun, drily. "And so long as you don't get your head turned or let the Beautiful get hers, I expect you'll grow wiser and wiser. Particularly with me out of the way. My vice is cleverness. I must be off in a moment, but before I go here's a warning for you, Cynthia. In your

pre-marriage days you took it a little too much for granted that your lovers could become yours friends. Don't make that mistake now!"

"I wouldn't!" said Cynthia, indignantly.

"That's all right," said Shaun.

"I should tick them off, as Phyllis says. Fancy an engaged girl using slang like that!"

"There's a married woman doing it here," said Shaun, rising. He looked tired to-night, and he spoke in a tired tone.

Peter and Cynthia with the same impulse came and stood in front of him. "Aren't you satisfied with us now that you are going?" cried the latter, a sad little tremor in her voice. "Are you afraid for us?"

"I'm always afraid for people who aren't in bad trouble. Now it's good-bye, you children. Don't worry about Shaun, for the Yanks will take good care of him. They like fellows with plenty of zip and spuzz in their work, and I've a happy knack of being hysterical in print! I can get warm-blooded facts down on the ground and bite and worry 'em. I tell you I was somebody over there in the old days. Peter will see me out, I hope; Cynthia, good-bye." He held out his hand with a firm gesture. There were tears in his eyes. "Quick, child!" he said.

Stooping swiftly, she caught at his hand and dragged it to her lips, then started back, swaying erect. "I haven't been all I might have been to you, Shaun," she sighed. "I haven't been half worthy of you——"

"Rot!" he cut her short. "We're friends. Shake hands, Cynthia. I daresay I shan't be long abroad. Good-bye." He turned and strode out of the room, followed by Peter. Neither spoke until the street door was reached, then Shaun said, "No need for words between us. Besides, I haven't any. Good luck, old man."

"Good luck," repeated Peter, gravely. He held out his hand.

XXI

SINCE the farewell dinner two days had elapsed, spent by both Peter and Cynthia in hard continuous work. One drew from morning to night, while the other wrestled with the housekeeping and formed a routine for herself and the maids. Although untrained, Cynthia possessed a fine power of application to detail besides inheriting much, if not all, of her mother's talent for house-management, and she had good material to work upon, as the maids were experienced and trustworthy. Accordingly she did well, and the servants decided that she would be a kind and considerate mistress.

Cynthia brought up the morning letters herself, having been out for a run before breakfast, and the first that Peter opened left him staring. Then he re-read it carefully from begining to end. "What's the matter?" asked Cynthia.

"Aunt Janet's in town, and wants to see me."

"Hurray! More money for Peter!"

"Perhaps she wants it back," suggested Peter, seriously.

Cynthia said, with a laughing tremor in her voice, "Perhaps she may."

He smiled. "All right then! Girls know such a lot. I'm to go any morning to the Windsor Hotel, so unless you want me to-day I'll get it off my mind."

"I always want you," said Cynthia, truthfully, "but you had better go, dear."

He was back in less than an hour. Pale and disturbed, he hurried upstairs and found Cynthia engaged in hanging curtains, green with a silver pattern on them, in the attic room. "Do you like these with the misty grey walls?" she called to him. "Oh, Peter, what is it?" And she hastily got down from the step-ladder.

"I don't know yet. I've been a fool, I think! Where's the letter from the Bath lawyers? She wants it!"

"You had it at Radgells, dear. Why, what's the matter? You didn't speak of it, of course!"

"She's sharp as a needle. She saw I was grateful——"

"I should hope so!" said Cynthia.

"—And she wanted to know why."

"Well, of course you had to tell her. You put it away in a morocco pocket letter-case, Peter, I remember! What is she like, then?"

"So I did! Thanks. That's in my trunk on the landing. Are you coming? She's like Dickens's Miss Pross—in *A Tale of Two Cities,* is it?—rough and sturdy and blunt, and I daresay an uncommonly good sort. Only she's got a precious lot to say for herself—unlike Miss Pross, who held her tongue. I say, Starry, I'm in an awful fix . . . I wish I could find the thing!"

"Here, let me look. Doesn't she like you, Peter?"

"Well, she wouldn't, you see, after having trouble with Father, and she's frightfully keen on National Service and soldiers generally—and I'm not a Territorial. She can't forgive that, as I'm a good rifle-shot. But that isn't the bother. . . . Oh, thanks. Yes, it *is* 'West, Hawkins and Bere.' I knew I couldn't be mistaken. Starry, I don't believe she ever meant to give this money."

"Come into the bedroom," said Cynthia. "Dyson can hear."

Peter suddenly showed himself irritable. "Where was Dyson, then?" he demanded.

"I heard her step below. Peter, *did* Aunt Janet give it?"

"That's just what I'm afraid of. There may be some awful mistake."

"There can't be, if those are her solicitors."

"She snapped at me about the name, but I've got it right."

"How snapped?"

"She asked in a sort of incredulous tone, 'West, Hawkins and Bere?' I thought I'd got the name

wrong. She does nag that way, tripping up a fellow. I must be off, Kiddy. She's waiting. Don't make such eyes at me!"

"Peter! Peter! Peter! Don't you see?"

"I see a beauty darling, a sweet-eyes, a shining Princess, a star-girl, my own wife! What else?"

"They aren't her solicitors. Shaun gave this money!"

Peter, starting back, collapsed into a sitting position upon the bed; and Cynthia suddenly giggled, as he sprang up again like a jack-in-the-box.

"I didn't know the bed was there!" he exclaimed, staring at it in amazement. She tittered hysterically. ". . . Shaun, darling! Shaun! . . . By Jove, I believe you're right!"

"That's why he had to go away. He had no money left!"

"Oh, I *say,* what a mutton-headed fool I've been! What a hopeless ass! I might have known it wasn't Aunt Janet! Poor, dear Shaun! And how rottenly ungrateful I must have seemed!"

"Peter darling, you must go to her, if she's waiting. You haven't been ungrateful; don't think about it until you come back. Please, Peter!" And she persuaded him downstairs and into the taxi.

When he arrived home for the second time, one sight of his face was enough. "Oh, my Peter! She was horrid to you! What a hateful woman she must be! Come to me, dear."

In silence Peter let himself be made much of; and then he gave a long sigh and began to look less miserable, and at length found his voice, after another mournful sigh. "You are good to a chap!" he exclaimed. "I don't know how you learnt all those pretty ways you've got! She wasn't rude exactly. She was satirically inquisitive, and I had to answer half a hundred questions about Shaun. She made me tell her every blessed thing about him! I was an ass; it didn't strike me until afterwards that she hadn't any earthly right to cross-examine me. Shaun had never used her name, you see! But she seemed friendly enough towards him.

And she wasn't interested in me at all. Why do you think she sent for me in the first instance? Simply because she wanted some National Service pamphlets distributed in the Great Company offices!"

"But how did she get our address? I thought of that while you were away."

"She hadn't got it. The letter was forwarded from my old diggings in Church Street. She seemed terrifically amused to hear of my being married. Cynthia, I can't get on with business women! She's got a frightfully rough tongue when she pleases and yet sits there expecting every bit of deference and attention that a man ever gave to a woman! I don't know how to treat her. I don't believe Father ever did! She says she's not coming to see you and she doesn't want to meet your 'swell relations,' but if you've got pluck enough to go to see her by yourself,—she doesn't want me again,—then she'll be very pleased. She told me to repeat her exact words."

"I'd better go!" said Cynthia. "Just think of Shaun, though! Isn't he a wingless angel? Just fancy his saving us that way! It was because he encouraged us to marry, I suppose. You talk about yourself, dear, when you were always perfectly sweet to him; it's I who ought to be ashamed! I, who ought to be—to be punished in some way."

"No, it isn't," said Peter, sturdily.

"Dear Shaun! And doesn't he love a deep-laid plot?"

"I don't agree there. I believe he would much rather be outspoken."

"We certainly would not have accepted the money."

"Not if I'd known it was the last of his capital! And now he won't take it back."

"I don't expect he will."

Nor did he, although they pleaded movingly.

The next visit that Peter paid was more successful, but it was not to his aunt, who had departed after a bluntly approving criticism of Cynthia's appearance and manners, delivered first to her face, then in the form of

a note to Peter, precisely as though he had asked for her opinion! No, this time he turned his footsteps towards Chelsea, lingered down Tite Street, and, summoning all his courage as he came out on to the Embankment, walked straight to one of the big houses which look upon the river, and rang the bell. With startling suddenness a footman opened the door, as though he had been standing on the mat awaiting Peter's arrival. . . . "Would you accompany me this way, sir?" said the footman, and he led Peter up flights and flights of wide stairs at a brisk, athletic pace, so that Peter had no opportunity on this occasion to admire the frescoes on the walls and the statues on the landings. "If you will be so kind as to make yourself at home, sir!" said his guide, showing him into an enormous studio, which covered the greater portion of the top floor of the house; and there he was left for half an hour or more, perfectly happy in gazing at the many beautiful things strewn about in a disorder that was astonishing to him after the formality of the hall and staircase.

"Here you are, then!" exclaimed the painter, entering in a tremendous hurry. "Very sorry to have kept you waiting. Didn't he tell you to make yourself at home? I thought you'd have been at work! There are plenty of tools about. I like a lot of servants and I keep the lower part of the house for them, and to give dinner parties in, but here one can always find anything one wants—in reason, you know, Middleton! For instance, I've never been able to get hold of a Zuloaga, and my Velasquez is a little less than doubtful! The experts don't doubt it, but I do. There's the Spanish school piled over against the wall in that corner. You'll find Velasquez in the middle if you want him. The David Coxes and Constables are here, and the Barbizon people over here. Now let me see your stuff! Shove the portfolio on this rack and get out of the light for ten minutes. I believe there's a piano under those tapestries—if you are musical——!" He pondered. "I had a Bluthner once; yes, it must be there! I don't mind noise, only don't come near me for a while."

Peter obediently retired to the other end of the room and began to enjoy himself among the David Coxes, while the singular genius who was entertaining him turned over his sketches, occasionally tearing one up. Peter started each time he heard the r-rip of paper, but he durst not interfere.

"Are you P. M., the cartoonist?" called the painter.

"Yes," said Peter, flattered. "Why?"

"Because if you make your living by it, I'll save this black-and-white sketch, which otherwise I should destroy. I don't want to see your filthy commercial drawings, my boy."

"I didn't know——" began Peter.

"Yes. Clever enough journalism. I'll pass it by. Now look. These you can keep and I'll show you the errors in them. Several I *had* to tear up; I cannot bear and will not have sentiment in landscape painting. Nothing here is really worth keeping, of course; but I daresay these may be useful. You can come whenever you like and when I go abroad you can follow me. Will that do? The run of the place, whether I'm here or not. Hints that no one else in England can give—and devilish few in Europe,—and I beg that you'll use my colours! You've been using cheap colours, and you mustn't do that, my boy! You really mustn't! You'll find them in the cabinet over there. Put down anything you want on the list pinned up on the door and send a man out if you want it at once. I give those men of mine a large hall to stand about in and plenty of liveries, and in exchange for that they keep my tubes filled. Oils! Now please don't vex me, boy, by wanting to work in oils for years to come yet; and I hope, never!" Because it does not strike me that your gift is for them."

Peter felt that he was expected to reply, and although a trifle sad at the loss of his longed-for lessons in oil painting, said bravely, "All right, sir, thank you! But do you think I'm worth your trouble?"

"You won't be any trouble."

"But are you sure you won't be disappointed in me?"

"Certainly. You are worth teaching."

"But are you sure you're right, sir? I simply dare not hope it!"

"I am never wrong. I never dismiss a servant and I do not expect to part with my first pupil. Make no misunderstanding, boy! I help you for the love of painting, not to gratify a good-natured impulse, and most emphatically not for the sake of your *beaux yeux*! You may be a regular young cub for all I know, though you seem a modest, harmless sort of a youth. That's nothing to me. You don't exist for me outside your work, and you'd better not try to, for I want to know nothing about your private affairs! What I respect about you, boy, is this. I found you just married to a beautiful and charming girl—hold your tongue! I don't wish ever to see her face again,—a first-rate figure model as well, I should say; and there you were, scraping moor on paper with a flint arrowhead, as an ancient Briton might have seen it! You were drawing Moor. Not thoughts about moor or impressions of moor or photography of moor, but plain Moor, on which a sun can shine, or a wind blow, or darkness fall. And you had not put your young wife in the foreground or the middle distance or any damned place at all! I respect that. I saw there was something in you, and I'm never wrong! What is more, I saw you were a man I could help; you might have had equal talent or twice as much talent, and not been that. But you are, and now you shall listen and begin to unlearn."

Whereupon he took the sketches which had survived and turned them over one by one with comments which appeared to entranced Peter as the most wonderfully helpful that a human being could have uttered; as indeed they may have been, since the man was a master, the possessor, in addition to the power of accomplishment, of a true critical genius. All at once he made a rush for brushes and colours, found them after emptying the contents of the cabinet upon the floor, plunged into the dressing-room for water, and with a sudden air of calmness and patience which came to him as soon as he took up a palette, began to work upon the last drawing. "I will show you," he said . . . "that I am right . . . that

although I paint in oils I am no fool . . . in water colour! There! Give me a bit of paper. I will show you the cloud that you saw; your cloud had the light behind it." Peter was enthralled.

"Now I must go," said the painter, consulting an enormous gun-metal watch, which he lugged out of an inner pocket. "I bought this at an auction, one of those where they sell watches and fools, but I was not a fool. I had a curiosity to see if anybody would pick my pocket."

"Did they?"

"I am too well-known in London. The fraternity remembers me. Years ago I bought a squirrel outside the Docks from a man who said that it was tame; but, as I suspected, it was drugged. On the way home a thief took an interest in my bulging pocket and inserted his hand. He screamed! The squirrel had recovered and bitten him to the bone! Now good-bye, my boy. You will come here whenever you please in daylight, and make yourself at home. The hall footman will tell me. And don't be afraid of my being offhand with you before strangers: you may remember from the way that I addressed your wife that I can be civil! Only when I said, as I believe I did at the time, that I hoped to make her acquaintance later on I was being imaginative. I lead a quiet life, because I never have anything to do with women. You'll come in a day or two, I suppose? I'm not working now, I'm reading novels; two a day for a few weeks, and then I shall have an impulse to go off somewhere. The South Downs, I dare say. I've just come across a book of Blackmore's, called *Alice Lorraine*. I may do the South Downs and a bit of Kent." He had talked himself to the doorway, and with a resounding "Good-bye," vanished through it and the heavy oak fell to with a clang.

XXII

Before long Peter was going regularly to Chelsea, whenever his paid work allowed him leisure in the morning. He did not belong to Cynthia until the afternoon, and not always then if an editor was insistent, for Peter had become a busy man. She was proud of his success and she had plenty to do herself in the early part of the day, so that the temptation to disturb him kept away from her mind until lunchtime; then if he was working in the house she gave him a silvery call of "Peter!" which brought him downstairs almost at once.

The instinct of the dinner-gong—the preference for punctuality and orderliness, inherited from Lady Bremner, which had forsaken Cynthia on the moor—reasserted itself speedily in Mayfair. The house began to run as by clockwork. Only, if Peter were at Chelsea and came back late, she understood and said no word, and took any trouble caused to the servants upon herself. Cynthia had always been kind to maids and treated them as human beings, which is different from realising that they are human beings, her next piece of progress in the liberal education which poverty provides for the formerly-rich. Cynthia, as a luxurious girl settling down to be a poor man's wife, made as many discoveries in human nature as though she had not studied literature and Shaun, had not chatted and worked with Mrs. Trerice in the kitchen at Radgells. Her mornings, busied with the machinery of house management, were devoid of romance. They might have afforded a useful corrective to the brilliant afternoons when her old friends called and exclaimed in admiration of her looks, fell victims to her charm, and best of all let her see unmistakably how they liked and approved of Peter. But

instead of that they seemed to make society more exhilarating, more exciting than it had ever been before. To go into it with Peter at her side, was a delight to Lady Bremner's daughter. She loved to see people receiving him naturally on his own merits, to watch the way in which the friends she had kept at arm's length during the last eighteen months forgave her upon meeting him, and while still unconvinced by Lady Bremner's skilfully-spread explanation of the elopement became willing to accept it because the husband was so charming. It amused and touched and rejoiced her. She had seen enough to know how very different might have been his reception; how different it would be now, were he not Peter, and had there not been Shaun!

At the beginning they had resolved on giving teas and very occasional informal dinners at their own tiny flat, for said Cynthia, "if we take to entertaining at restaurants it will be the end of us." But then, people seemed to like Bohemian tea-parties. They crowded into the small drawing-room, sat on pouffes or on the floor in the most cheerful fashion, when the supply of chairs gave out—though Phyllis's friends, in spite of being the youthfullest and wealthiest guests as a rule, showed a marked reluctance to part with the more comfortable perches when older people arrived. Cynthia congratulated herself on town being empty, or they would have been overwhelmed. As it was, they had more dinner, luncheon, and even dance invitations than they knew what to do with; and Peter only now began to get a true conception of the multitude of his wife's acquaintance, though several times before he had thought he had done so.

They were living in a whirl of excitement and pleasure, which to Peter came as an entire novelty, and was coupled with success in the career he had chosen; he would not have been human if he had not been slightly exhilarated! He was more elated than conceited, and did not forget to be thankful, but he had the same idea that deluded England, Europe, and the World in that mad and merry month of July before the Great Ca-

tastrophe, he thought that the critical events were all over and that he could read the future clearly written. It seemed as though life must always be the same, with Cynthia by his side brilliant and glad as a summer morning; with his profession and his art yoked peacefully together before the chariot that was bearing him to fortune; with his character now fixed and unchangeable. And to Cynthia also it seemed as though nothing could alter. Daddy and Mummy liked Peter and were growing fond of him; Alan wrote amiably from ports of call; her friends were enthusiastic; her housekeeping a success. At least Peter called it so, although they were living at a rate above their income; and his praise was enough. She felt certain he would earn more than the £200 a year he estimated and was not really alarmed by an expenditure that would have horrified Shaun. They were entering unconsciously in those three or four short weeks into phases of development which were full of the promise of trouble.

Their social life meant for Cynthia the resumption of an old habit, while to Peter it was new: yet it affected the character of the former more than that of the latter, because Cynthia was unconscious of the change in herself which the honeymoon had brought about; she did not realise how much it had deprived her of self-consciousness. She was beginning to dress daringly. Convention had given both mother and daughter in various degrees the peculiar notion that young married women should dress differently from unmarried girls of the same age, but Cynthia went further than Lady Bremner approved and not for any reason that she understood, for she failed to grasp her daughter's complete carelessness of the opinion of anyone in the world but Peter. Hitherto, only the mother's skilfully quiet dressing of the girl had prevented her from being run after by certain sets in which extreme decorativeness has a social value and is liable to cost its owner dear unless she has means enough to go the pace. In these sets, thanks to Madge Tressly-Buchan, Cynthia was now becoming a favourite. Madge had returned from abroad while

Cynthia was away, and had settled herself upon the Thames. She was therefore near at hand, and remaining faithful to her friend—more faithful than she had been to her chauffeur—she contrived to lead the pair into a vast amount of expense. As Lady Bremner informed Peter, she was "the worst possible companion for dear Cynthia," for dear Cynthia followed her to keep her out of mischief. During one week-end at Taplow she and Peter made enough acquaintances to ruin a young couple with ten times their income. Nor did Cynthia dislike them personally now, as she had done before her marriage. They were charming to her because she was beautiful and strikingly dressed, and before when she had been striking and beautifully dressed they had not attempted to be charming. That was partly her reason, and it was possible also that now she was more open to flattery, simply because she was too happy to be sharply critical, too indifferent to take much heed of anyone but Peter, and also made glad by approval of his choice.

She was actually youthfuller and less on her guard as a wife than she had been previous to her marriage, and yet she was thoroughly conventional in those weeks. Roughtor was left behind, the harum-scarum behaviour of the moor forgotten; climbs and untidiness and loosened hair seemed things of the past; Peter was amazed to see her suddenly become the society woman. Society had the opposite effect on him to that which it had upon Cynthia. Its exhilaration soon wore off, and left him subtler and more critical and disposed towards a kind of defensive formality. One or two of her gowns in the extreme of the fashion shocked poor Peter, privately, although they were his own fault, for he had praised her shoulders, and her limbs, and instead of saying outright as he was more than once inclined to do, "That reminds me of Phyllis's style of dressing," he admired weakly and did not even question the expense. Indeed he could not help admiring, and Cynthia was too joyous to perceive a mental reservation. The girl was not temperamentally adapted for an impulsive

kind of existence, and perhaps the deliverance from discipline under the shadow of old Roughtor had been too sudden. Still, her naturalness there had had a noble simplicity. Cynthia was born to be wise, not worldly-wise; she appeared sophisticated and was, in reality, innocent. She was simply asserting a girlish love of beautiful and expensive clothes and a girl's desire for the admiration of her husband.

It was strange for Peter to find himself sympathising with Lady Bremner, as he did more than once in small matters when Cynthia rather naughtily set aside her advice. He had not reached the stage of thinking it possible the girl could be wrong, but he was conscious of an increase of affection towards the mother. Peter's ideas of propriety placed him midway between the two. Shaun had often called him an old-fashioned boy, Cynthia in a month had become a new-fashioned young woman; while Lady Bremner's views were those of Sir Everard, which dated from farther back than Peter's and were more rigid and even less logical. In this stage of their development Peter was steadied by his art, whereas Cynthia had nothing external to assist her: she was in the giddy position of a person who has emerged suddenly upon the summit of her ambitions.

The news that Austria had declared war against Servia did not interest either, although the advisability of making some studies of Servian national costume was beginning to dawn upon Peter. However, during the day the cook collapsed in the kitchen and was removed to hospital and operated upon for appendicitis, "just in time," as the house-surgeon expressed it, so there was not much opportunity to consider international politics. They resolved to follow the painter to Sussex, and it was actually in the train that Peter read of Germany's invasion of Luxemburg.

XXIII

They found lodgings in a market gardener's cottage on the outskirts of a little country town. From the window they could see the green roll of the wide downs stretching like the curve of a wave along the edge of a smooth country, and the rounded summit over which the shadows chased each other reminded them strangely of the moor and yet was gently different, under a fleecier sky. The quiet speech of the Sussex folk was unlike that of the Cornish; they were Saxons as opposed to Celts, and somehow the Saxon had less dignity, less friendliness. There was more of respect and habit in the English nature, so that Cynthia did not dream of entering the kitchen of the gardener's wife. The gardener had a sturdy independence of his own and might not have cared to see her there; that was what she felt, nor was she conscious of the impulse to learn ironing from Mrs. Thorne when she observed ironing going on. She wondered if the change were in herself.

The garden was full of strange blossoms, of which she and town-bred Peter did not know the names, and on Sunday the scent of the flowers came to the window where they sat, together with the calling of chiming bells and the whisper of a soft breeze that stirred the leaves of the clematis under the sill. A shower had darkened the ground and the smell of good moist earth rose to them, too. It seemed to Peter one of those moments that are unforgettable. A Sunday paper was by his side.

"Why didn't he plant his roses in the front?" asked Cynthia, pettishly. She was not thinking of roses.

"The Master says it means War," said Peter, employing his favourite nickname for the painter.

Cynthia compelled herself to speak lightly. "I'm glad you are not a soldier, Peterest!"

"He's glad. Darling, this will be an awful business if it does start."

"England, France, Russia, and Servia against Germany, Austria, and Italy. We shall beat them easily enough." England thought so then.

"I don't know. Shaun had a great respect for the German army, and nobody knows yet what submarines can do."

"Perhaps the Government won't fight!" said Cynthia.

"You bet the Germans are trying to get them not to."

"Well, I daresay they'll succeed!"

"Aren't you interested, Starry?"

"Very much, indeed. Tell me, should we have to send an expeditionary army to France?"

"I daresay we should. A small one."

"A small one! Then we shouldn't have to increase our army much?"

"We might, dear. Cynthia, I may have to go!"

Cynthia sat staring in wretched silence out of the window. She did not see the peaceful down, nor the white of the chalk quarry against blue sky, nor the high clouds sailing overhead. It had come at last. He had said what she had feared he would say, and she saw only a closed barrier and a troop train drawing out of an empty platform, and heard behind her a roar of cheering. . . . She started and swallowed as the church bells broke in upon her vision. The troop train vanished, and the shouts of the crowd which had seemed almost menacing, and she listened to the sweet, church bells. "I won't keep you," she promised.

XXIV

YET she did keep him, unwilling to let him go prepare, and the Master said that artists had nothing to do with war. Peter was slow to take action, always. Time enough to get ready to enlist when we entered the war. Time enough, time enough—it was the cry of England! Besides he hated the Service manner of doing things. Although a first-class rifle-shot he had never joined a Territorial Corps for that reason, and when Aunt May had pitchforked him into the Great Company, instead of sending him in for Woolwich, it had been chiefly the glamour and the position that he regretted, not the life, towards which he felt no leaning. He, though a soldier's son, had not the love of the army in his blood.

He was walking alone on a wide country road, mounting between trees. Nearing the summit of the hill was a flock of woolly sheep, black-legged and baaing in lamentation. They ran in a cloud of dust, pursued by a collie dog and a small urchin with an ash crook taller than himself. Above the dust was the clear edge of the hill, a sharp grey line across the sapphire sky, and the tall elms rose nodding their feathery tops on either hand. Suddenly a cart appeared hanging like a fly to the summit, and dipped into the cloud of dust and, emerging, grew bigger. It was the fourth of August. The driver was absorbed in a newspaper, the reins hanging loose, their ends clutched by his left elbow against his side. "What's the news?" cried Peter. "Is it war?"

He was fair and florid, with a big moustache turned straw colour by countless suns and stubby light hair of the same curious burnt hue, and he had very bright, perplexed, blue eyes. "I'm readin' about the big Band Contest!" he said.

"Is it war, man?"

"Ye-es, we're at war with them Germans," he replied, in the same soft drawl, "but I'm readin' about the band contest, for I play the piccolo, I do."

Peter hurried on. There was a sound in his brain like the toll of a booming bell, striking the hour of England, or was it his own hour? He was not consciously afraid and the noise, produced by excitement, soon died away. But long afterwards, in his delirium, he repeated over and over again, "I heard Fate knelling! At the beginning I heard Fate knelling. . . ."

XXV

In the market-place Territorials were parading to march to the station. Women and girls hovered calling farewells, men talked together in groups upon the pavements, carts blocked the entrances to the narrow side streets. The half company formed column and swung out into the high-road, holding themselves stiffly; more upright than was their country wont. "Cut all their topheads off!" cried a smocked carter, reaching high, cracking his whip wildly, and the children started at a run to follow, while a strange sound of farewell, half shout, half moan, rose from the centre of the square whither the people had now closed in. They stood dully motionless, looking after, until a strong, tenor voice struck up *Tipperary* from the head of the disappearing column, when suddenly there burst out a roar of cheering. "Go on, lads! Hurray! Hurray!" the people called, drowning the music, and streamed along the high-road. Long after the square was empty Peter heard the distant lilt of the marching chorus. It faded, rose again . . . fell swiftly . . . murmured . . . died: and he turned on his heel to go and enlist.

XXVI

He found a very old gentleman sitting alone in the library of an old-fashioned house with a red tiled roof, and a wide verandah overhung with creepers, and a straggling garden where roses bloomed untended and tall hollyhocks waved and grass grew upon the walks. "General Westoe's doin' the recruitin'," they had told him.

"Come to enlist?" asked the old man. "That is right, Mary; show them all in here." He wore a short, white moustache and imperial, peered with near-sighted, gentle eyes. No judge of men would have doubted him to be a very lion of courage. He spoke with the kindliest courtesy, and after another gaze at his visitor, begged him to sit down.

Peter stammered in his eagerness. At the back of his mind he knew he was committing a treachery to Cynthia by rushing off to bind himself without disclosing his intention beforehand; but it had seemed the only way to do it. "I want to get in to the 99th, my father's old regiment," he ended.

"I met your father when he was a captain in Burma," said the General. "We saw service together. Would you not go through one of the Officers' Training Corps, Mr. Middleton, and try for a commission?"

Peter explained that he hated soldiering, did not feel that he ought to take a commission, and was just married. He wanted to get the parting over.

"It is not my duty to discourage a recruit," said the old officer, sadly, fumbling among the forms on the edge of the table by which he was seated. "I wish I thought that our country does not need you." An idea struck him and he leant back. "But may I ask you a question? Have you office experience?"

"I was with the Great Company for some years."

"Then would you for the time being consent to work here with me? I know it would be a sacrifice of your personal inclinations, but your assistance would be invaluable, as I have a quantity of confidential orders and notices passing through my hands. Being commandant of the National Reserve I come in for everything. There is no garrison in the neighbourhood, and I cannot obtain so much as a couple of orderlies!"

"I believe I ought to go at once, sir," said Peter. "Because I'm afraid to go!"

General Westoe smiled a queer, little twisted smile. "That argument does not weigh with me," he said politely. "I cannot attach much importance to your apprehensions. I have found invariably that men who are ready to admit their fears do well on active service. No, sir, I will send your name forward if you insist on going, but not for that reason, which makes no appeal to me."

Peter sincerely trusted the old gentleman was right, but that was just what he had wanted to make sure of by actual experience as soon as possible. He was bewildered enough by this time to be uncertain whether the impulse which had brought him hither were cowardly or brave. The sight of the disorderly documents on the table and the thought of unconscious Cynthia urged him towards surrender, as did remembrances of his unfinished picture of the blue water seen across a windy distance from the top of a green down, and of the shadow of the Master falling large on the ground before the easel. What would that watching figure say to his precipitancy? And he had promised drawings to three editors. Ah, that released him!

"I'll be very glad to stay with you," he said.

Cynthia did not weep over him on his return. She looked at him for a moment in wonder when he told her, and for days after trembled whenever he went out of her sight, and spent the hours while he was away in a sort of dumb agony.

On the 6th a cable came from Shaun, having been

delayed in transit. *Coming wait for me,* it said. Peter waited. His work at the Recruiting Office did not occupy him the entire day. He had still time for the Master, Cynthia, and his drawing—not enough for Cynthia, who was apt to haunt the neighbourhood of the office in panic lest he should suddenly escape from her. She did not forget how nearly he had gone, and worshipped General Westoe, who showed none of the Master's indifference towards a lovely young woman. Indeed the General spoilt her. He would always send out a servant to call her in to wait in comfort in the drawing-room, kept them both to lunch or tea on most days, and not infrequently when the War Office issued contradictory instructions brought them to her for woman's wit to unravel.

"I should like your opinion, Mrs. Middleton, if you would oblige me."

"What does Peter say?" Cynthia would ask, bending her pretty brows over the typewritten sheets.

"Your husband's clear, business brain—permit me, Middleton—recognised at once their contradictory nature. He sent off an urgent telegram on the subject as soon as he received them. Do have a peach while you are thinking."

Cynthia laid down the papers and selected a peach, delivering judgment as she did so. "I believe two different people wrote them without consulting. Thank you."

"They are both signed by the same authority," objected the old gentleman, with gravity.

"I really think then he must have signed them without reading them," persisted Cynthia.

The General turned to Peter and nodded. "You were right. We were both right! And men come here, Mrs. Middleton, to enlist and are sent away again because of errors of this nature—most disheartening to them and to us. It took us seven days to dispose of an Irishman, a National Reserve man—a most excellent soldier, passed by the doctors, all ready to go! For some reason or other the Depôt would not take him at once, and I assure you the man was heartbroken. He had seen service in

South Africa and was most eager to get to work again. Besides, he had given up his employment, and the family with whom he was lodging chaffed him somewhat unmercifully on his reappearance day after day. Finally I sent him off on my own responsibility with a strong letter to the O.C., and the last we heard of him was—what was it, Middleton?''

''He was showing a recruit a rolled-up puttee. 'Shure, and d'ye know hwhat that is?' says Pat. ' 'Tis hwhat ye toie round yer throat to kape the dust out of yer oyes!' ''

''Exactly! From which I conclude that he had recovered his spirits. Excellent material! The Irish are wonderful fighters. They are admirable soldiers in peace time, too, so long as they are worked hard by officers who understand them, but they can't stand idleness, at least that is my little opinion! I once had a head gardener who used to tell me, 'I always like to hear your little opinion, sir,' and the phrase stuck, Mrs. Middleton! I generally speak of 'my little opinion.' It sounds modest and an old soldier ought to be modest, although I do not know that the quality is desirable in a young one—certainly not in a cavalryman.''

By the time that Liège had fallen and Shaun James had reached England the three were become fast friends, and Cynthia, through the General's introduction, had obtained work from the Soldiers' and Sailors' Families' Association. Each day now seemed all too short for her. She soon mastered the clerical part of the business, and took the lead on the Committee, being the daughter of a K.C.M.G. It had been formed on the English plan of assembling, first, a lady of high rank and small capacity as chairman, second, all the people who would have felt affronted had they been left out, and last, a minority of genuine workers, who, while others talked, did quietly what had to be done, grew accustomed to be overruled, and only forbore to resign because they feared they would be wanted in the future. Well, now they were wanted—badly; but being in England of course they were not given immediately full power.

It takes fear to teach the English how to organise.

The sobering of spirit which the war induced in all classes was soonest felt in that to which Cynthia belonged, and the nature of her work led her amongst a class which gave of its best and for the most part suffered in silence, being already near to the realities of life. The reaction in Cynthia was girlishly complete. She wore old clothes, half starved Peter for a few days in a wild fit of economy, and was the means of encouraging Madge Tressly-Buchan to enter the London Hospital as a probationer, a patriotic feat for which the staff of that institution were probably not grateful. Phyllis declined to follow. *They are safer without me,* she wrote with much truth, *and my old crock is a Colonel of Yeomanry, whatever they are! Do write, darling Cyn,* if *they have anything to do with the Yeomen of the Guard, because in that case I ought to know. A Colonel rides anyhow, and I want to get a uniform like his and ride with him.* She announced that she was going north for that purpose in a few days. Joyce, on the other hand, wrote sensibly, rejoicing that her mother was coming home from India, and with much pluck saying little about the cause, which was that Major Ommaney had been ordered to France with his regiment. Practical Joyce was already learning to knit.

The first intelligence of Shaun James's return came from Lady Bremner. *Daddy thinks so badly of the war,* she wrote. *I suppose you know that Mr. James is back in town. I met him,* much to my surprise, *in Piccadilly, and he asked me whether he looked young enough to pass for thirty-five. I could not conscientiously say that he did.* The news was a shock to Peter and Cynthia, who could not understand Shaun's silence. They respected it, and a few days later received the following letter.

CRYSTAL PALACE,
August 17th, 1914.

Dear Peter and Cynthia,

I have joined the R.N.R. Division named after the good King Alfred and look as I have not looked since

I was five years old, only they will not let me carry a whistle slung round my neck on a white cord. Tiresome of them, very. I wish you could see Shaun in his sailor suit; his trousers are exquisitely baggy at the ankles and his collars an inch wider than any one else's (Liar!), but I do not wish you to see him if you do not mind very much. He hates meetings and partings.

I asked you to wait until I came back, because although I am going for selfish reasons I also consider that I am replacing you, Peter, among our gallant defenders. You will break my heart if you go too. My work is over and yours is to come. My wife is dead; yours is with you. I am unhappy; you are happy. Honestly, I shan't be very sorry to be knocked over, provided it's painless. You don't know what it is to outlive the power to do one's best work. Lately I've done nothing but think of Doris. I didn't seem able to hustle up to Noo York's standard—believe I should have got the sack if I'd stayed. And Peter! I've missed you two kids a bit. Don't talk more rubbish about money; I had a lot of fun out of you, and it was worth it!

If you feel you owe me anything show some moral courage and stay at home as I ask you to do. You'll find it a damned sight harder than going, old boy. You two stand for the future of England. There won't be any gentlemen left after this war. Have a lot of children. Don't be a fool about that. Only don't let them destroy my Charles Ricketts, which I've left you. It's over at New York.

This war will last five years and if we get through it it will be by the skin of our teeth. I know England.

Those apes at the Recruiting Office swore I looked over forty, the impudent devils! I went the whole hog, according to my principles, and said I was thirty-three, made a great point of being only just that age and pointed out that if I were really over forty I should certainly have called myself older than thirty-three! Bluffed 'em.

I've been wondering—Peter, forgive a bit of a sermon

at the last: it is *the last. I know I'm going west!—whether I did you good or harm with all those lies. I've always been a believer—in my heart—in truth at any price. Doris—well, we won't talk about her now, but I was straighter while she was alive. Fact of the matter was I formed a habit while I was young. My mother didn't understand the kind of boy I was. It was all a pity. You and Cynthia haven't misunderstood all this time, I hope? You've known what I really admired? I tried to save you from lying, to do it all myself. But somehow things look different now with the Shadow of the Wings of Death over us. I've wondered whether I did wrong. Try not to be hurt by anything I did, please, for my sake, both of you.*

Don't reply, except 'Good luck and good-bye, Shaun. We understand.'

I believe in one God, Who is Love, and he that dwelleth in Love dwelleth in God and God in him. Thank Him, I've always lived in my work! An artist's no good unless he does. Remember that, Peter, even though you lose her and it breaks you up.

God bless you, old man, and you too, Cynthia.

Yours,

Shaun.

P.S.—I don't often write without a postscript! Never was there a more laborious novelist than I, anyhow! I've often written 10,000 *words to get* 500, *and so my letters are rotten, not written. 'Providence is a bit of a Character,' and if I come out alive at the end it won't be the first presentiment that has gone wrong. I was going to say this. If I'm killed—and you'll hear, because I've told the authorities you are my only surviving relative—then call one of the kids, a fair-haired one for choice, by my name, will you? Thanks. If I'm not killed, don't; for it would be a pity to go against Cynthia's mother, with whom I want you to be always on the best of terms.*

XXVII

They were glad that they had not written to the Savage Club; what hurt them most was the disappointment of not seeing him, which a kind of shame prevented Peter from bearing well. He grumbled, while Cynthia wept, and each added a few sentences to the short message that Shaun had asked for. Otherwise they obeyed him.

And so August drew to a close, with sheep upon the downs, and fields patterned with stooks in the morning sunshine, and leafy lanes, and much laborious work for both man and girl. Cynthia made friends rapidly, swam in the river at dawn, and played lawn-tennis after her rounds were over; Peter had painting and drawing to do when the General released him. Sometimes he took moody walks by himself. Cynthia was very tender to him, but she had lost for the time her great fear lest he should go. Shaun's sacrifice, which she looked upon as all sacrifice, had removed that terror. She was often gay, always bewitching, a girl difficult for a young husband to leave, and her unconsciousness made it doubly hard.

Meanwhile recruits were coming in every day and Peter fancied that each one looked at him contemptuously: ploughboys; a pugnacious draper, a little bantam-cock of a man; National Reserve men with respect for the General; an ancient shepherd who grieved because he might not go; labourers with a deep interest in the army as an investment, who roused the General's ire; others who were mainly eager to get to the front at once; a stray Canadian whose language was free and strange,—the General did not mind that, for, "They tell me these fellows make good material," said he. Also

there came a north-country mechanic who took a chair unbidden and lighted a big cigar and conversed in quite a patronising way.

"Ought we to enlist a chap like that, sir?" asked Peter. "He said he'd been working with Cammell, Laird, the shipbuilders."

"We cannot help it, my boy, in the present state of infernal muddle! I daresay he'd be much more useful turning a lathe or whatever he does do, confound his impudence! But this is a free country except for men who do not desire to join a Trade Union or employers who are willing to employ such men, and nothing can be done."

Slow-thinking Peter decided this was a pity, and that he would alter it if he were able, wherein he was exactly eight months ahead of the Government.

In the last days of the month, as the Germans swept towards Paris, fear grew again in Cynthia's heart like an evil weed, choking her happiness.

On the 29th of August Peter came home early while the landlady was setting out Cynthia's tea. "Shall I lay a cup for you, sir?" she inquired, but he said no, he had had tea at the office. Cynthia arrived and found him sitting idly in the big basket-chair doing nothing. "What's the matter?" she asked quickly. "Aren't you going to paint to-day?"

He shook his head.

"How nice! Then we'll have tea together. I won't be a second taking off my hat."

With an effort he said, "I don't want any tea."

She looked at him. Her voice was the voice of a frightened woman who understood. "Oh, but, Peter, darling, you must have tea! It cheers one up so."

"If you like!" he said. "Thank you."

Her instinct was to avert further talk and she went to fetch his cup herself, but on her return she saw that he was trying to control himself enough to announce his intention, and asked hastily the first thing which came into her head, "How is the General?" she quavered.

Peter's answer came in a rush. "All right. The office is in order now. I've said good-bye to him and to the Master. Cynthia, I've got to do it."

Her eyes were blind with tears. She was stirring away mechanically, one elbow on the table, her chin supported on her hand. Still she made a pathetic pretence of not realising. "Are you going to take a holiday, my darling . . ." she began. "My darling!" Her voice trembled into silence.

"I ought," he said. "Shaun can't take this off my shoulders . . . can he? No, no, don't speak! I know he can't. I'm a good rifle-shot, and they're beating us; they're driving us! We need every man. I don't want to go, Starry dear. I don't want to go! I hate it. I'm afraid. But I must!"

He had risen. She looked very still and small and white under the shadow of her big hat, sitting there at the table, gazing with blind eyes.

She opened her lips and no sound came but a little gasp. Then she whispered slowly and painfully, "I . . . do . . . love you . . . I . . . do . . . love you. . . . I promised. . . . I will . . . be brave!"

Next morning they left for London.

XXVIII

THE period which follows the making of a desperate decision is usually more peaceful than that which leads up to it, even in those cases when action is not possible at once. The next fortnight was the happiest that Peter had ever known. Sir Everard and Lady Bremner were as kind as though he had been their own son, and the Master, though simulating wrath, in reality approved. *You may be quite certain I shall not take another disciple!* he wrote. *One is enough. Your place will be vacant for you when you return. I beg of you not to sell hasty sketches to the periodicals.* This from him was equivalent to a blessing. Shaun replied: *I expected you would. Well, it is a great game! Goodbye with you, Peter. Tell her this will complete her education. War teaches girls to trust in God.* Outside was written, *No, neither, please.* They had asked whether either of them might come to see him or write.

"Good-bye—God be with you." It sounded strange from old Shaun. He was one of those men who from humility deny that they possess virtues. He would never allow that he was honest, industrious, or pious. Yet this was his farewell, worthy of the strong and simple mother who bore him,—and it heartened Peter.

Peter's own impulse was to enlist in the ranks, but Sir Everard and Cynthia pressed him to apply for a commission. Both pointed out that there must be a shortage of officers later on. "They could promote me from the ranks," objected Peter. His personal feeling was that the whole business would be unbearable unless it were done thoroughly. He loathed it so much that he wanted to be where illusions were not. A visit to

the Great Company showed him Semple and Blotter about to join an Officers' Training Corps; Mulholland had already gone, and he would have liked to serve with Holly, but somehow he could not bear the idea of working side by side with Blotter and Semple. He felt that their presence would destroy the dignity of death. Their society would throw him back upon an intolerable loneliness. Cynthia pointed out in vain how unfairly they represented the class from which the new officers were being drawn. Peter wagged his head. He couldn't bear the sight of one of that kind, he said, he'd rather be with ploughboys: he would not even enter one of the reserved battalions. "You'd find there some fellows you liked," urged Cynthia. "Some! Yes," he rejoined. "That isn't enough! Darling, I'm sick to death of snobbery. It's a danger to this country. So's conceit and every other illusion. I'd sooner be amongst people who are grossly real. I must be real, if I'm to go through this business; it won't be bearable else. That's how I feel. I'd rather serve a chap like Semple than mess with him and be his brother officer, not that he may not make a decent enough officer, but . . . oh, you understand!"

"I'm afraid I do," she said, sadly.

"Besides, I want to get out at once. The waiting is the bad part, I'm sure. When I've been under fire I shall be easier in my mind about myself. You see, I'm useful at the butts and I know my drill pretty well, although I've never served—Father used to drill us at the first school I was at; and if I join a Line regiment I may get out with an earlier draft. I've been round to-day to the War Office and seen a chap who knew Father well, and he says he can work it for me by speaking to the Colonel of Father's old regiment. One battalion is near to London and they are sending drafts all the time. I believe it can be worked. I don't feel I ought to be an officer. I'm not suited for it."

"All right!" she said, trying to be brave and cheerful. She managed. She looked up with a sort of smile, but his eyes were cast down. That was what was most

cruel to her now. He dared not look directly at her for fear of weakening his resolution.

"Perhaps the war won't last long!" he said, reading her thoughts. "They are fairly on the run now, at all events."

It was the 11th of September, and next day Peter enlisted.

Again he was under discipline, which did him no harm at this stage of his development, for freedom had been intoxicating after the Great Company. How far away seemed the offices of the Great Company now! The clerks stalked in his memory like pale ghosts, conveying horror to his mind. They had seemed more unreal still when he spoke with them face to face. Even Brown had not impressed him as before, was withered somehow; while Lemon, to whom Peter had meant to speak his mind, had baffled him—he did not seem to be living in the same world. Peter had gone away without a word. Had they ever lived in the same world? That was difficult to believe when the radiant image of Cynthia stepped in between in his thoughts. Laurence Man was a shadow. Indeed all around him in the regiment were at first shadows to Peter,—which slowly hardened into reality, assumed form, and became alive.

Drill was easy. He was strong and fit, well-liked by his comrades and watched by his officers. The Colonel sent for him and offered to recommend him for a commission, which he refused. "Very well, Middleton. I think you are wrong. Is there anything else I could do for your father's son?"

"I want to go forward, sir," said Peter steadily, thinking what a liar he was.

"That's the right spirit!" approved the Colonel, and he nodded dismissal. A week later Peter was warned and given short leave to go home.

Why was he anxious to go at once? he asked himself, at the close of the first exquisite day of home; was it all cowardice, or was there mingled with it an honest desire to be up and doing? He could not tell. With his head on Cynthia's breast, lying awake hot-eyed, he could

not tell. "Please God I do my duty," he prayed, as his father had done before him and many a Middleton previously, but this Peter did not know or think of. He must have prayed audibly, for her arm tightened about his shoulder, and then suddenly God seemed to be in the room, close beside in the shadows.

A long while afterwards, he spoke to her in a hushed and awe-struck whisper. "Did you know that God is Love?" he asked. "I know it now."

She clung to him, detecting the passionate happiness in his voice, glad for him; while for herself afraid. "Shaun said so," she murmured back.

She felt a thrill; he had trembled. And now he was gently kissing her soft, rounded breasts. She knew he was comforting her, and the tears sprang to her eyes. Ah, she was lonely then! "I can't believe that God is good when He takes you away from me!" she said. "I can't!"

"It'll come!" he whispered hastily, with swift fear and half-belief.

She accused herself, meaning far more than she said: "I haven't been to church since we were married!"

"Churches aren't everything," he returned. "I'm to be blamed because you did not go." His thoughts were like flames leaping and dying after a vision, revealing faintly what had been.

"My fault!" she said.

"No, mine."

"Mine, Peter." Her words came freely. "I wasn't clever enough really to do without church, I suppose! Perhaps I was too happy. I ought to have gone. I'm not like you or Shaun. Women aren't. And so I drifted away."

He was silent, his bliss destroyed.

She continued, with diffidence. "I've never been accustomed to go to church regularly. I know it isn't everything, it isn't much, perhaps. . . . Humility is everything, which you've always had and I haven't."

Now he felt the throbbing of her heart under his cheek. The smooth warmth of her was close, close her fragrance,

her kindness, her beauty, but she and her love seemed very far away. They were a pin-point of light beyond the stars, receding. What was this that was driving her away from him? He searched; enduring in that one instant an agony of pain and fear. "God!" he cried, inwardly, "God!" And the pin-point flickered. It stood still. It was barely perceptible among the myriad stars of heaven. He clung to the sight of it as a dying man might clutch at the ebbing tide of life, and all the while he was searching, searching for the cause, his thought coursing to and fro like a hound upon the scent. "Why? Why? Why?" The pin-point was growing larger, the tide turning. Love flowed back into his heart. Love was blinding him with its great flame. God was blinding him; the flood of light swept upon and overwhelmed him. A still, small voice whispered, "Where is your humility, Peter?" and he awoke, holding Cynthia's warm body, while his soul reached out to her soul. "Yes, God does love!" he said, aloud; and uttered the truth to her, saying, "It will come."

XXIX

THE memory of that night did not stay with Peter. In a day or two he had forgotten it, for he had not received the vision rightly. He had taken it as a personal consolation rather than as a revelation of Truth. Nor did he ever remember the fleeting vision again. It had given him trust in God, which did not forsake him; knowledge of God it did not bestow on him, but that might come later. The girl pondered over his words and learnt much from them.

. . . . . .

Cynthia was so proud of her soldier that she liked to walk the streets with him for the youthful pleasure of seeing the passers-by glance at the tall figure in uniform and for the sake of occasional greetings from her friends. She was conscious of a strange sensation, which was enjoyable; she was in the background, accepting the second glance. When she understood, she smiled with happiness; she liked Peter to be first, and hardly since she could recollect had she been able to enjoy the solitude of the unnoticed. Not to be stared at was deliciously restful and unfamiliar.

They had strolled through the mellow sunshiny streets behind Park Lane, crossed dear Oxford Street with its roaring life of traffic, and turned into the quiet of Portman Square. Lady Bremner was at home. Her welcome made them both her children. Then Sir Everard entered, graver than of old and very silent, but kind. He took Peter into the library, which was a place of unhappy memories, but Peter saw at once that they were forgotten. He was the friend, speaking with affection, almost taking the place of a father. He spoke now as Peter had longed then that he might speak.

The boy felt a glow of thankfulness and gratitude. To whom? To Shaun and to Cynthia, yes; and here was the change, to God as well. "You need not be afraid for her while you are gone. We will look after her. Don't be worried about money, Peter." There were good-byes—a warm handclasp from Sir Everard, whose face never lit now and whose eyes were less keen, or was it only that they were more kind? Then a plunge into the drawing-room to bid farewell to Lady Bremner, who kissed him, and he found himself with Cynthia in the street. "I was calling to you," she said. "In my heart. And you came. I was afraid of crying. I don't want to cry."

"Perhaps it mayn't be to-morrow," he said, to comfort her.

"You think it will. I'm a soldier's wife, dear, I won't be silly! Shall we look in at the Cinema at Marble Arch for a few minutes?"

They had formed a habit of doing so in the early days of their married life in London; how long ago that seemed! And Cynthia wished to do each of the old things that they used to do, for the last time as it were—as it must not be—to keep them as memories when he had gone.

"Right!" said Peter. "I'm with you."

But when they turned in to the darkened theatre the topical film was just appearing. There were sentries being relieved, Canadians disembarking, "Naval Volunteers departing for an unknown destination."

"I wonder whether it's Antwerp!" murmured Peter. sitting erect. "Didn't you say there was talk of that?"

"Madge said so."

The men were marching past the camera out of the picture, while the orchestra played *Rule, Britannia* and the audience cheered and clapped. A few months ago Peter would have been thrilled. He was not thrilled now. He watched steadily, unmoved. The faces filed by; grim, laughing, and devil-may-care in endless procession.

"A lot of these chaps are scarcely trained at all," he remarked. "They can't be sending them."

Suddenly the girl shrieked, unnoticed amidst the din of applause. She leaned forward, clutching Peter and pointing. "Shaun! Look!" she cried.

At first Peter did not see. Then his rapid glance overtook his friend, who had crossed his line of vision unrecognised. Shaun looked weary. He was on the outside of his file. He looked older in uniform. It was all momentary. Then just as he was moving out of the picture he half turned and smiled.

"I'm glad he smiled to us!" said the voice of Cynthia at his side, and Peter became conscious of pain in his forearm, which ceased as the girl leant back. She had seized him with a grip strong enough to leave a dark bruise behind.

Antwerp had already fallen, but Peter did not learn the fate of the King Alfreds before he went away, in spite of the fact that his departure was postponed for nearly a week. Peter belonged to a crack corps and had no business at all to be in the battalion in which he found himself, among seasoned men; and at the last moment his Colonel had kept him back—being compelled, however, to send him forward with the next batch of drafts, owing to the regiment having been badly cut up during the intervening days. The wonder was that the men he served with did not resent Peter's presence. On the contrary he was popular, from his quietness and lack of assumption and because he was a soldier's son and had chosen of his own accord to serve in the ranks of his father's old regiment. Besides, there was no nonsense about Peter and, although he disliked it, soldiering came to him by instinct. He never let down his company on parade, marched from the first like a veteran, recovered at once from his typhoid inoculation, and gave no one any trouble at all. What his comrades failed to understand, after they had seen him with Cynthia, was why he was so ——— keen to get out to the front! There was nothing especially warlike in his appearance or demeanour. Peter himself

sometimes wondered why Kitchener's rules should be overset for an insignificant person like Private Middleton. It seemed that he had gone straight to the one man in the Army who had the disposition as well as the power to give him an early opportunity of being killed. Cynthia hated the Colonel secretly and wished she were base enough to report him to the War Office.

Peter departed from Charing Cross at three o'clock on a chilly morning, with an icy wind wailing under the roof of the deserted station and a low black sky pressing down, across which withered grey scuds of cloud chased each other at intervals; a weird and horrible going. He had contrived to get word to Cynthia and she was there, looking like a ghost herself in her long, grey cloak; but she could not approach him. The detachment marched straight through on to the platform. She was under a lamp, with her head, on which she wore no hat, thrown back. She caught a glimpse of him and smiled, and he passed from her seeing her smiling face in the air before him, suspended as a man might carry the memory of a saint or a heroine. She looked both in her courageous, pathetic beauty; and so the company entrained.

As she slipped out, elbow raised, wrist across eyes tragically, a gliding figure of woe, other soldiers came marching into the station yard, bearing their grey, sausage-shaped kitbags on their shoulders. Their tramping feet seemed to shake the stars as they marched by her in unending procession, and she quivered and shook, holding herself bravely upright, a fist clenched at her side, with still those hidden eyes! All down the line the laughter and jesting ceased as the men passed her. She was England, whom they were leaving. They, who were about to die, saluted her.

XXX

"SERGEANT says we're likely to 'ave a quiet night."

"There isn't much that he doesn't know," responded Peter, without irony. His section was lined up in the dark outside the officers' huts, waiting to start for the trenches for its first experience of warfare. Three miles or so away were those trenches, in the quarter from which sounded an intermittent rattling and banging, composed of many different noises. Peter was disappointed to find a singular lack of impressiveness in this distant pounding. Every now and then, apparently only a short way off, a light floated up into the darkness. "German star-lights," said a voice behind him. The occasional boom or crash nearer at hand was unimpressive; but then from the beginning Peter had been struck by the difference between the imagined and the real psychology of war. He had found soldiering a drab business of rasping shirts, smells, sweat, foul language, and exhausting toil; all of it without formality or pretence, and therefore not hard to endure. He much preferred the coarse jesting and monotonous oaths of his present comrades to the self-conscious beastliness in the Great Company.

"I wonder when I shall begin to be afraid," he was asking himself, when his neighbour remarked to him in a low voice, "Ain't it ——— cold? Why don't our ——— little cove come out? 'E don't think of the men. 'E ain't no ——— cop!"

"Here am I going into the trenches at last and I can't think about anything but swear-words," said Peter to himself. "Why do you always call everything 'bloody'?" he murmured, irritably.

"Why not, guv'nor?" inquired the Cockney at his

side, who was a pal of his. "We ain't never objected to your not usin' the word."

"Sorry!"

"Don't apolergise! Yours is an 'abit, same as ours."

This presented a new train of thought to Peter, interrupted by the dilatory subaltern, who came out drawing on his gloves, adjured them to "pick up their feet carefully," and started them off down the pavé, past lines of waiting troops, dim in the darkness; past carts and a row of omnibuses. The condition of the road was abominable, and it took the section more than eighty minutes to cover a stretch of two miles; then they halted outside 'headquarters,' which appeared to be the cellar of a house, of which little else remained. On again, in single file, after picking up their guide, who led the way across fields where the mud was like a living thing. Here Peter stepped out of the line and was immediately bogged to the knees. His comrades lugged him out, everyone cursing instinctively. There seemed even for Peter nothing else appropriate to say until he had emerged with a plop and could thank them; he had been alarmed at the sensation of being sucked downward as into the centre of the earth by some fiend. Now on every side sounded snaps and cracks and whistlings and hissings and stirrings. "Bullets!" suddenly thought Peter, and saw a spark like a glow-worm flash where one of them struck a tree, against which a moment later he came bump, having stumbled over the falling body of the Cockney. A flare went up, throwing a pale, sickly light all around, and "Down!" called the sergeant's voice. Peter was down already, prostrate beside his tree. His cap had tumbled off, his head was touching the head of his chum, who did not move. There was cold, dank mud beneath his cheek and presently a warm moisture spread into his hair and trickled through to his forehead. Jerking himself away he glanced round and saw a profile near, which stared upward with dropped and hanging jaw. It was the first time Peter had seen death.

"This is beastly," he thought, as they lurched forward again into darkness, "this is a very beastly sensation."

He felt a kind of sickness at the pit of his stomach, a brassy taste in his mouth and a confusion in his brain, and he knew that he was ducking automatically as he strode. "This is fear, all right." Another flash from the sky broke in a tremendous uproar. Down dropped the line of figures again, Peter with his nose over the edge of a big crater of the width of a street. The thought that this was a shell hole sent a creeping horror up his spine. "Forward," came the order, and off he went, hanging on now to the tunic of the man in front, for the track here wound in and out; and they lost a man who was carrying a sack of coke and had to haul him out of a smaller round hole filled with water. And then they crawled on all fours and stopped and crawled again until they came to a sloping gap which led into the communication trench.

"Very unpleasant, but it might be worse," said Peter to himself, with philosophy. His head was steady again and the sick feeling had passed away. Literature, he decided, had exaggerated the terrors of being shot at. It wasn't a bit like anything he had seen described. It was more unpleasant and less appalling, more like a visit to the dentist than a descent into Hell. He thought vividly for a few moments in flashes, saw pictures—Cynthia running, the dining-room at Portman Square, Shaun's face bending over an open book, Cynthia's eyes, her mouth and chin in a mist—then tripped, glimpsed dead Tippins's staring profile, shuddered, and came back to the present. He was cold, the dead man's blood was drying on his temple, and the sergeant was shoving him into a side-gallery.

Then he hurried through a labyrinth of burrows, dodging right and left after a new guide, who had been waiting at a corner where six roads branched off. "Keep your heads down, men." "We've got a long way to go!" said a voice behind. The new guide turned and whispered confidentially to Peter, "No distance really. The communication trench will be five times this length in a month or two." "Yes, sir," said Peter, and found himself all of a sudden in the trench proper, recognising

it by the parapet of sandbags and the row of figures huddled in niches, slightly raised above the six inches of mud and water that formed the bottom of the ditch. The word made him think of country lanes, and then he was stationed behind one of these figures, and waited while officers and non-commissioned officers shoved past him to and fro, murmuring explanations and orders to each other and the men.

"Good evening!" muttered Peter, civilly, to the back of the man he was about to relieve.

"Evenin', me lord! Sorry your lordship should 'ave to stand in the mud, but we 'ad no notice you was comin'."

"Been busy?"

"Last night, yes. I dessay you'll 'ave to dig in a lot of our chaps. We ain't 'ad time." Something moaned overhead. "I call them seagulls, I do."

"How long will it take to relieve you?"

"Don't know nothin' of time in 'ere. Best part of a hower, I dessay. Look 'ere, son. You get that ——— sniper who bobs up behind the willer-tree stump. 'E got my pal last night afore they started shellin' us. I leave 'im to you. I bequeath 'im! 'E's a Bosher an' a 'arf. Any of your chaps finish, comin' in?"

"My chum did," said Peter, suddenly feeling a kind of shocked loneliness at the thought and betrayed into speaking aloud, whereupon came a hoarse, angry growl of "Hold yer jaw!" from an N.C.O.

"Mind, I leave the ——— to you," whispered the man in front, when at last the order to change places ran down the line; and Peter stepped up with a consciousness of being at the front of the British Army. There was the darkness that contained the enemy, and it spat, buzzed, yelled, moaned, and crashed for some five minutes as though in greeting of his arrival. Meanwhile he crouched uncertain whether his head were under cover or no.

All at once a thin flame shot up rocket-like, burst, and hung glowing in the air. It lit the scene like a brighter

moonlight, and Peter saw a network of barbed wire in front of and below him. Shifting his gaze onward he saw quite near a long mound of earth with steel shields shining in it like window-panes; it was criss-crossed with barbed wire before it, which was white with dew. The heads of a couple of Huns disappeared, simultaneously with an outburst of rifle firing from both sides. Of one moon-face he retained a clear impression, which often flashed later across his memory. At the moment he forgot it utterly in swift search for the stump of a willow. There was a line of short, stunted pollards some way back, approaching the German trench from behind obliquely, yes, and a stump; when a whizzing sound whistled through his hair and carried his cap off. Furious with the anger that the first experience of being aimed at seldom fails to rouse in a recruit, he let fly, foolishly and at random, and ducked.

" 'Ere, you clumsy mooncalf, you 'it me in the eye with your ——— cap! Can't you keep it on your silly 'ead? 'Ow d'you think I'm goin' to clean out this gawd-forsaken drain if you put my eye out?" came a grumble from behind, and Peter became conscious, as the light waned and dwindled into darkness, of a new sensation, or rather the absence of one. The 'dental chamber' feeling had gone. "It's beastly," he thought to himself, "but I'll make it a damned sight beastlier for them!" He felt savagely resentful towards the Hun who had had the impudence to attempt to make Cynthia unhappy. There was something surprising about it. He realised the inherent wickedness of war. The Hun meant to kill him, but he jolly well wasn't going to, not while Peter knew it!

This mood lasted during the next two hours; then he began to calm down and take a businesslike view of things, made himself comfortable in his niche and adjusted his mind to the business in hand. Flares went up at intervals, and once Peter thought he got a bullet through a loophole in one of the steel shields, but of course he could not be sure. There were a heap of stones around one of the posts which supported the

German wire entanglement,—perhaps it had once marked a grave: the sight of the sparks flying from these stones was curious; each time a flare went up somebody aimed too low. The smell of the moist earth reminded Peter of a garden in Sussex. Oddly enough, Joyce was more present to his mind than Cynthia in those long, black hours of cold and waiting and cautious staring into thick night, which suddenly broke up into pin-points of flame that crackled like whip-lashes, or else blazed into that unearthly bluish-white moonshine. Cynthia was in his heart, but little Joyce seemed close by his side, cheering him with her friendly chatter; Peter had not known how fond he was of her. She seemed to be telling him that he would come back to Cynthia.

Peter was half-frozen by the time he was relieved at four o'clock. He and his comrades crouched in a 'funkhole' round a charcoal brazier and tried in vain to thaw the whole of their bodies at once, although they were muffled already like Tweedledum and Tweedledee. And this was only a first taste of the cold of winter—nothing to the nights that must come. They talked of eating-houses and of music-halls, football being too chilly a subject; the very thought of looking on at a football match made these Londoners feel colder.

With daylight, came permission to sleep, which Peter did not hear, as he had already drowsed off where he sat; "Let the kid alone," the men had told one another. He was awakened by the trickling of mud and water down his neck from the wall of the dugout, against which he was leaning back. It was then time for another meal, which was accompanied by a row outside like the noise of London traffic, with motors throbbing unusually loud and exhaust-pipes blowing off every few seconds; most of the traffic seemed to consist of motor-bicycles. Overhead went yells and screams and rumblings and bangs, but all was quiet again when Peter was turned out. He was shocked to see the legs of a corpse, and its bearer, disappearing into a communication trench. "Who's that?" "Sergeant." The sergeant had been like a father to him, though not an

indulgent one, and had a wife and five kiddies at home.

This man had warned him, "The worst part of active service is when you've got nothin' to do but think and ain't too tired to." Well, Peter supposed that was true. Certainly up to the present the anticipation had been more hideous than the reality. He had seen sights both grotesque and horrible, which had not struck him as meriting those adjectives. Reality has a dignity of its own, which realism lacks. Perhaps, being a soldier's son, he was more fitted for a military life than he had thought, for he found himself cool. He had proved fear and found it a nasty feeling to be endured, not a terror which gripped a man by the throat; and evidently one forgot it. That was a great relief, almost as great as the relief had been of learning that Cynthia's love was his, and he took up his position at his loophole stiff and sore, but with an easier mind than he had had since the beginning of the war.

He had been moved some distance along the line, which he now perceived to run up the slope of a low hill, or rather mound, over the summit of which it disappeared. The German trenches proved in daylight to be only a hundred and fifty yards away at their nearest point. He was amazed to see how the ground below was pitted with shell holes; it seemed an impossible business to charge across and get through the barbed-wire entanglement in the face of rifle and perhaps machine-gun fire. From where he was, the sniper's stump was not visible, but he could see five slender willows and presently after a puff of black smoke and loud report there were only four. He looked at the gap in the row and thought to himself that war was just knocking things down and breaking them, an uncivilised, brutal business and no mistake. Then he perceived three or four round pulpy masses between him and the Huns, which once, yes, by Jove, they had been haycocks!

Peter's time of watchfulness passed without movement on the part of the enemy. He shot a cap off and hoped there was a head beneath it. Judging from what

was going on behind him he thought it more likely there had been a stick or a bayonet.

A meal, some unpleasant fatigue duties, a postcard for Cynthia—Peter suddenly discovered that he was too excited to write a letter,—and then the word was passed for Middleton. "Can you draw, Middleton? Then go to No. 3 and report to Captain ——. Keep your head down." The lieutenant who spoke dived into the officer's messroom, a luxurious dwelling roofed with two doors torn from some deserted mansion, while a murmur arose behind Peter floundering out into the mud, "That blighter's always gettin' the wind up." The captain in question was unpopular.

However the cause of his wanting Peter had nothing to do with panic or excitement. He had been trying to sketch the scene through a hyposcope and, making a poor job of it, had sent for help, which Peter rejoiced to give. This was the opportunity of all others he had desired—to gain some idea of what was going on around him. And yet there was little to be gathered, although he was now on the summit of the eminence, from inspection of the dull plain stretching on every hand. It was scored with lines which might be trenches and might be water-courses. It was withered and battered inconceivably, and over parts of it was drifting a grey, hovering smoke. To the left, Peter looked through a deserted village some half a mile away, made remarkable by its church of which the top part of the steeple was leaning over at right angles. So he drew it, and then, peering again, made out that a gigantic image had been knocked sideways and not detached. To the right, he caught glimpses of a winding river, far distant, which gleamed silver under a spurt of sunshine, and vanished again. A few smoking ruins and skeleton houses were visible in the landscape. As he watched, one of the houses collapsed.

All was calm. All was still. Peter had just noted how much wider and higher was the enemy's wire entanglement than ours, when an aeroplane sailed into view overhead. Immediately its path was marked by a tail

of bursting shrapnel, showing that somewhere Archibald, the patron saint of anti-aircraft guns, was alive and awake. Confound Archibald! But the aeroplane mounted higher and disappeared, just as Peter was called away. He had already learned that a soldier seldom sees the end of an incident in war, unless he has missed its beginning.

At three o'clock sharp the bombardment was opened by a solitary 'boom,' and five minutes after that the air was splitting with the scream of shells and the bumping noise of the bursting high explosive. The racket was deafening, crash and shriek and thud being indistinguishable; its effect, paralysing at first, and far more horrible than rifle fire, even when the ear became more or less accustomed to the infernal din. This went on for ten minutes, which seemed to Peter hours—fortunately he was employed carrying sandbags for the building of a traverse, a warm, stiff job which left no opportunity for psychologic analysis. Once he was knocked down and nearly smothered in the black mud that rose like a fountain from every hit, but so far no one in the trench had been damaged. The barbed wire had suffered, a few sandbags had sailed fifty feet into the air, disintegrating; and the communication trenches were having a bad time. Then the German gunners got the range and shells began to fall in the trench itself. There was too much row to think. Peter had a vague feeling that he would never see Cynthia again; nevertheless she seemed close. He was sent from his traverse to build up the parapet of the trench, which meant a crouching run of fifty yards to another pile of sandbags. But when he reached them they were gone and the dugout in front of them had gone too, and the rifles of the squad with which he was working. Only a pile of rubbish remained, blocking the way. Over was certain death, for the bullets were coming sideways in sheets. The only thing to do was to return for spades, and dig. The corporal jerked him back as he was starting to climb, and when Peter recovered his balance and turned he saw the file retreating. There

was no question of orders, they could not be heard; it was push and point and follow-your-leader. Peter started to follow. He was now three yards behind the corporal; on his right, the back of a soldier, for all niches had been filled up as the men stood to arms. The corporal disappeared round an angle and the spade of the first man returning, held most dangerously at the charge, appeared past him at the same moment. It was the last thing Peter saw. He had a perception of rising feet into the air and whirling round, and then every faculty was invaded and blotted out in one stupendous crash. His seven senses were annihilated in flame; and there was no more Peter.

XXXI

First he became conscious of a stirring, a criss-cross of innumerable, waving, grey lines; they opened out and showed him glimpses of a ceiling which was not white, a smoke-stained ceiling, and then a voice roared into his ear with brazen clangour like a trumpet, but he could not distinguish the words it said. There was a distant buzzing that reminded him of something, and people spoke far away. The mist swirled and quivered from the effort he was making, but the gaps in it had closed up; and he leaned back, as he thought, dreamily, and asked with resignation, "Am I in a telephone, please?"

For a moment there came no answer. Still he had a recollection of having heard the words uttered, which helped to dissipate the mists, even though the voice which had spoken was weak and unfamiliar. He thought that he had spoken himself. The ceiling was clear now and as he lowered his eyes a decided, girlish voice answered with a Scottish rolling of gutturals, "You are in a Base Hospital, soldier-r, and all r-right!" She had sandy hair and freckles and looked immensely capable. Where had she come from? What was she doing in a trench that had suddenly changed into a Base Hospital? What was a Base Hospital, then? "A-ah!" he sighed, remembering. "You've wor-rked your ticket!" said the nurse, encouragingly. "Cheer up!" Her small, blue eyes were staring at him.

Perhaps she thought that he did not understand the soldiers' slang, for she added, "You're going home verry soon. We have not r-room for ye, he-re!"

Peter was conscious of a violent headache and pain a long distance off,—could it be in his leg? He felt

drowsy. "It was a shell, I suppose?" he whispered. "Where was I hit?"

"It did not hit ye at all!" she said with Scotch literalness, but still his eyes remained open, and she picked up a tablet that was hanging from the foot of the bed by a string. "I will tell you what is the matter-r, soldier-r, and then you will go to sleep, yes?"

He blinked, and was almost asleep; then his eyes opened again, and she thought there was anxiety in them. His whole face said, "Please!"

"Shock, so you must be verry quiet, and par-rtial dislocation of the patella (left)—that's your knee-cap, nothing at all—and some splinters in your r-right foot, which we've takken oot. Ye'll do fine! Good morning, soldier." She rose, without haste, smiling, and as she did so was snatched from Peter and vanished into darkness.

XXXII

THIS was a beneficent, health-giving darkness, very different from that first terrible possession of him by flame and wind. And only a week later he sniffed sea-smells and drowsed into the cool, bright ward of a hospital in Sussex, where he awoke to find a girl bending over him, in a dress the colour of autumn leaves and a black hat that framed her face, her beautiful face with sparkling eyes, which shone and dwelt on him so lovingly! She was adorable, this kind, tender, Madonna girl; he had dreamed of her. He tried to raise himself on his elbow to look, and just as fear flickered in her gaze, it all came back to him and he whispered, "Cynthia!"

"You must not talk!" she said. "Lie back quietly, please, please, Peter, or they might not let me come again!"

But the sight of her had brought with it full recollection and a curiosity that he had not felt during the week of somnolence. "I suppose we did hold that trench all right?" he asked, wistfully, for the first time. Never before had his brain been active enough for doubt.

"I don't know," she confessed.

"Is there anyone of our chaps here?"

She glided away, while he lay wishing feebly that he had not sent her, for she passed out of sight in a moment, leaving an empty world. "What a graceful girl she is!" he thought. "It's like a strain of music dying away when she goes."

> *"That strain again; it hath a dying fall;*
> *O, it came o'er my ear like the sweet south*
> *That breathes upon a bank of violets,*
> *Stealing, and giving odour! . . ."*

He was proud of his comparison; and then was vexed, and angry tears leapt to his eyes because she had gone. He had not guessed how weak he was, but at all events he was himself again, the dulness of stupor had lifted. Why, he had not known his wife, had not recognised his darling. . . .

The music rose again. She came, smiling. "No, there's no one here, but they say the trench must have been held, or you could not have been brought in. Oh, Peter! It is sweet to see you. And I put on my nicest things. I was wearing an ermine coat; not extravagance! I bought it before we were engaged, with a legacy which came to me. And I must show it to you now, for I took it off while I watched you, because I felt hot with excitement, Peter. Are my cheeks flushed? They say I had better go, and come back to-morrow. Darling, darling, good-bye!"

Soft music fluttered into silence, and he slept.

Cynthia had had no presentiment of what had occurred. She had been thinking of him while dressing for tea at her mother's, but no thrill of fear had warned her he was struck down. When the news came she had felt disloyal. Mingled with her happy relief was a sense of shame that she should not have been aware of what was happening to her man. How she had worshipped the Scotch nurse, who had found time to write a reassurance! "He was only temporarily deaf and not blind at all, for which we may be very thankful. I think he will get quite well, and the surgeons think it also, since he has youth and health." Her strong, kind, splendid Peter! Her Peter! She had flown to the War Office and been advised patience, and her mother had been very tender, and then Sir Everard had found out to which hospital he was assigned, and the sympathetic servants had been placed on board wages, and again Cynthia had travelled into Sussex, this time alone and first class, given into the care of the guard by her father. She had made the journey with her hands clasping the ram's horn which they had picked up on Brown Willy. She had found it in a drawer in

the course of packing when hunting for a lace scarf, and it fitted into her muff: and now she clung to it desperately as to her memory of past happiness; it was a symbol that the past was not wholly lost. Then had come the arrival at a strange farmhouse, whose address a friend had given to Lady Bremner, and the silence after the rattle of the streets and the racket of the train, and the awaking to, in place of thick curtains and the glimpse of chimney-pots, an open lattice window and a hedge, dew-spangled, like a network of gossamer against a primrose sunrise sky.

The clarion call of a cock had been her bugle. She had breakfasted in bed, and dressed with haste and gone forth to see her soldier.

They were wonderful, those first days of Peter's recovery. Still some birds were calling from the hedges; their song was divine to Cynthia. And when a pair of goldfinches flashed across the lane, or a robin tossed upon a twig, piping poignant-sweet, or a wren flitted along the hedgerow, or once when, walking briskly in the frosty air towards the hospital, she saw a gaggle of wild geese flying high, four birds and a leader, with their curious hard-flapping flight, she felt herself a part of nature, she felt that nature was rejoicing with her and that she sang one little note in a universal jubilation. That morning she was able to speak to Peter.

She said, slightly blushing, "I want you to forgive me for something—if you are not too tired to talk, my darling."

He smiled, still lying flat, still feeble; but looking now more like the Peter that she knew.

"Yes, but you may not! Only I was not sure, though I ought to have been. Besides, it was easier to let you go not knowing. And I was foolish, Peter! I am still, but you'll help me and understand. Do you?"

His eyes had grown bewildered. "Is it news of Shaun?" he asked quickly. "Tell me, please. At once, dear!"

She started in horror. "No, no, no!" she exclaimed. "There is no news of Shaun. He's still missing!"

Peter raised himself on one elbow. "Missing!"

"I forgot you did not know. He may be a prisoner, Peter! There may be hope."

"What happened to the King Alfreds, then?"

"Most of them are interned. Oh, I forgot you had not had time to get our letters!"

He fixed his gaze intently on her face, sinking back. In that moment he could not remember Shaun. "Then, is it . . . ?" he asked.

She nodded, blinded by tears from this meeting of death and life. Then, low she said, "Yes! You are glad, aren't you? Dear, I want you to be glad!" When after a long, long silence she could see again, she forgot to doubt; and he began murmuring sweet thanks to her, tender praises. "Darling!" . . . "Darling!" "Fancy its happening to us!" came the old cry familiar from the beginning of the world. He said, "Brilliant Shaun is childless, and we commonplace——" He did not finish, while she recollected, terror-stricken suddenly, that he was not safe yet himself, thought how he must go back. "Don't!" she implored.

"Is there any hope for him?"

She had to admit, "Not much."

"I say!" His face twitched and he turned aside, burying it in the pillow. He had realised.

But since now she must be kept from all thought of sorrow he compelled himself quickly to look back, and said, "He wanted it, the dear old chap! It's all right. Forgive me." He swallowed and stopped; and lay meditating with one hand weakly outstretched for her to hold, gave one of his slow, kindly smiles. "It's all right, darling!" Then, "We are wiser for having known him, better, too; and the child won't repeat our mistakes. And there's his work. That lives. . . . God's good, you see!"

"I'm learning to pray, now," said Cynthia.

The days passed by without news of Shaun. He had disappeared in the retreat from Antwerp, leaving not a trace. A comrade wrote from Holland where he was interned, *He made a joke and that is the last I remember*

of him. Another man said, *I believed he was wounded; I'm not certain. He was a good fellow.* A prisoner wrote, *I'm sure he died fighting. He isn't with us. He was a queer bloke, and he was a rare good sort; he could spin yarns by the hour.* An officer who returned told Peter that James was very much liked. "He could always tell what was going to happen. He would have made a fine general." This man described him also as a firstrate sailor, anxious to get to sea. Then Shaun must have been disappointed at going to Antwerp, Peter thought, and he sighed, while the lieutenant went on, "A C.P.O. overheard your friend tell another man that he always ran away when a battle began, and came to pass me the word, but I laughed at him. The last thing I saw of James he was going strong." But this was the night before the retreat.

The days passed by, and the young husband and wife learned to regard each other more calmly, although for weeks each caught the other's eyes fixed upon his or hers with a look of shining wonder. Peter had returned as it were from the dead, and Cynthia was to him a living miracle. Nor did she cease to be in becoming once more the girl he loved, but he thought of it less often, and won back his comrade by slow degrees—for at first after her announcement she had been shy of him. It was only slowly that she came back. Although really unaltered in personal appearance she seemed to him often to wear the Madonna look. Gradually be became used to her.

Through the hospital window he could see the rain-clouds scurrying across the downs with broad beams of winter sunshine breaking between them, or a clear and snowy sky. When he got up first the downs were white with frost, and when he went into the open air every hedge was red and black with berries. Hips and haws were innumerable; they covered the bushes, bestowing a depth of colour that was wine-rich from a distance, but shallow and scarlet when seen close to; which Peter achieved sooner than anyone expected, too early for Cynthia's peace of mind. She began to think about the

parting when she saw him out of doors, and with that came a curiosity as to the details of war, which he could not satisfy. He could draw her sketches, but he could not explain.

"The interest consists in just doing things. There are heaps of things to do. I haven't seen enough yet to talk about it!"

She guessed that this was only partly true; sighing, she changed the subject. He need not have been afraid for her! "Did you ever think of me?" she asked, and then she blushed and the dimples came roguishly, and her stars danced in youthful eyes. The answer was plain to be read before it was spoken, and Peter, getting well, began again to make love. He laughed happily. "I'm always wanting you, dear!" he said. "You are never very long out of my thoughts!"

"That's right," approved Cynthia, gravely.

"I can tell you, too, sometimes while I've been training, I've longed to be able to paint. Of course I can store up impressions, but it isn't the same thing. I'm hungry to work, sometimes!"

"I believe soldiering is harder for an artist than for anyone else!" exclaimed the girl.

By the end of November he was walking firmly, and was allowed to join his wife at the farmhouse. Those were tender days, to be smiled over afterwards with tears; the deepest and sweetest that they had lived together, days of bravery and winter weather, of dear monotony and love under the shadow of the parting.

She went up to London to see him off by the one o'clock war train from Victoria station. Peter, with a group of men from his regiment who had been on short leave, was to go in the first section of the express, which was in reality two trains, one leaving a few minutes before the other. The platform was packed with people, though double barriers held back the merely curious, and only relatives and friends were allowed inside. There was a roaring of excited laughter mingling with the roaring of steam from the engine, voices tremulous with tears called jocose farewells,

officers' wives with drawn faces chatted with their husbands in low tones, men yelled greetings to each other, the few porters bustled to and fro. Over all was an air of gaiety, of good-natured waggishness. Then the whistle blew, and Cynthia was in his arms, crushed and clinging and still brave.

Passengers bundled into the carriages, women threw last kisses, children were set down hastily with puckered, uncertain faces, men who were alone turned from the windows, fathers called admonition, sons waved in silence, husbands drew themselves away and gazed, soldiers and still more soldiers thronged on to the carriage steps as the train jerked and slid on with increasing momentum. Peter's face was passing; it was going, vanishing, amid a noise of banging doors and rolling cheers from the train and a feebler, thinner echo from the platform. Umbrellas and hats waved high around Cynthia. They obscured the view and he was gone. Soon the last carriage of his train was disappearing also.

As Cynthia made her way slowly through the throng around the second train she looked neither to the right hand nor to the left, yet somehow people made room for her. Inside the barrier was an old lady with silver hair, an old lady in black, sitting upright in a wheeled chair, behind which stood an aged manservant in livery. Her eyes were not upon the crowd, they were on the past; and then she glanced up and saw the girl by her chair. "Is it gone?" she asked. "Yes," replied Cynthia, at that moment jostled by a drunken woman. The old lady leaned forward and said in a deep, clear voice, "I have lost four sons, and it is my youngest who has gone now. My dear, I will pray for you." She sat back in her chair, upright, and closed her eyes.

XXXIII

Cynthia returned to Sussex. She felt that she must be alone awhile.

She wandered in the lanes as she had done with Peter, and lingered slowly by the dear farmyard where the pigs talked to themselves all day long. Indoors, Fire-log murmured contentedly on the hearth; his sap smelt sweet. And she walked up the down, and hailed Brother Sea, clothed in shaggy garments in the distance. Somewhere out beyond was Peter, and perhaps he marched, and perhaps he fought, or perchance he bled. The breeze tore at her, and she was wrapped about in noble space under a grey, swift progress of clouds. She thought she smelt salt in the wind and heard the thunder of cannon from the Channel; in imagination she listened to the lapping of the water against the black hull of a ship. One moment she was Britannia, draped in the Flag, defiant, heroic; the next, a girl anguishing for her lover, who was fighting hidden behind the horizon in smoke and flame.

After tea she climbed the down again, and watched cloud castles pile in the evening sky, peaceful like dreams, while the silver moon looked over a world lying hushed and still. Mists slowly lined the valleys. Darkness and silence settled upon the landscape like closing wings.

XXXIV

News of the bombardment of Scarborough brought a fuller realisation of the war to the quiet farmhouse. The widow woman who ruled it sent her eldest son to fight. Even Cynthia's pulses beat faster as she read, and she knew that she understood better than before, despising her weakness. Her husband was in danger already; how could her comprehension of war's horrors be quickened? But it was.

So it was also by her visit to the little town where she and Peter had worked, which was within a morning's walk from the farm. She went to lunch with a friend, intending to return by train; and as she entered the outskirts of the place she saw a bend of the river, and the line of willows along the bank and, beyond, the high paling of the bathing enclosure. In memory she could see within it the little platform on the bole of a gigantic willow, the plank projecting from it above the stream, and the steep ladder of approach. She remembered how on one occasion when she came from the undressing hut she had found a number of young girls sitting about, swimming or splashing in the shallows, all of them listening to a slender brunette who was lounging with an air of saucy confidence on the diving-board above the smooth-flowing water, engaged in chaffing, one hand on hip, a timid bather who clung to the bank. Cynthia had ascended the high, rickety ladder and waited for the girl to move out of her way. "Look at the waterfunk!" cried the latter, pointing downward with her bare arm, and seeing Cynthia step on to the board she dived, with a casual grace that was enchanting. Cynthia had followed and swimming to the shallows had called to encourage the waterfunk, who was not so young as her

tormentor. Eventually the girl came too, and she and Cynthia had tried to teach their elder to swim. Both of these people lived in the neighbourhood, and shortly after Cynthia left the place the younger married an officer who was billeted in her father's house, while the other, who was a professional nurse, went to Belgium with a Red Cross party. She was killed a month later; the day that the child who had teased her became a widow.

Such was the story of which Cynthia was reminded, such had been the news in her friend's letter. Before she had read it she had scarcely believed, in her heart of hearts, that it was possible Peter should be taken from her. Somehow this worked a change, and henceforward her fears were deeper-seated. The loss of Shaun had not brought war so home to her.

On Christmas Eve she travelled to Portman Square to rest in the affection of her own people and of Joyce until the New Year, when the flat would be reopened. She had steadfastly declined to make a longer stay with her parents, where her surroundings would not recall such memories of Peter. Besides, she had a feeling that her duty lay in his dwelling. Taking care of her man's home and belongings was to be her life in future.

XXXV

EARLY on Christmas morning, while Cynthia was drinking tea in bed, Peter was seated in a dugout belonging to a first-line trench named "Fleet Street," doing his best to write a letter. He had only a stub of a pencil, nothing on which to support his notepaper except his knee, and was prepared to be called to arms at any moment. From the right came the sound of distant singing, from the left that of an occasional rifle-shot. *We've had a worrying night,* wrote Peter.

Trenches have grown deeper than they used to be, he went on, laboriously. *The bottoms of ours are lined with boards. Thank goodness; because I've got a touch of rheumatism in my knee and am going a bit lame. Nothing to count.* He stopped, and pictures came into his mind. He saw a grey-green German tunic rip at the point of his bayonet and felt the resistance of flesh and gristle give way and the heavy body collapse towards him, twisting the rifle sideways in his hands. It occurred to him that he had never seen the man's face. He had got only a crack on the knee in that charge; of course it had been the knee damaged before.

He remembered what a time the regiment had had before our artillery got the new range, at least before they had got it right! Can't tell her that, he thought. Then there was the charge of those Territorial chaps, and the glimpse of Semple dodging backwards into the enemy's fire! The only advantage of being a sniper was that you had field-glasses and did see something sometimes! Peter had been in a ruined house, which every now and then became a target for shells. He had been there two days and the telephone officer who occupied the basement had warned him to turn out at

noon sharp as the Huns were punctual people. Sure enough, on the third day the house was knocked flat, absolutely wiped out, by a salvo. Can't tell her that either, or about Semple—if it *was* he—running backwards into machine-gun fire as though it were hail. Some of the men had had their hands over their eyes, and God, hadn't they gone down! Few of them had got there. Wonder if old Semple were one.

Blotter had been killed in England in some accident. *I haven't a scratch, darling. I hope Phyllis will be happy; thanks for the cutting you sent about the wedding. My love to Joyce and your people. Fancy Laurence Man getting that job under Government! He always had brains and now I should think he ought to go right ahead. I feel sorry for the chap in a way. . . .*

At this moment a couple of R.A.M.C. stretcher-bearers made their appearance round an angle of the communication trench down which Peter was looking. The trench was particularly deep for those days, so that they were able to walk without stooping: it must have crossed what had once been the side-walk of a street, for Peter noticed that the top layer was formed of paving-stones. Against these grey stones the two heads, held erect, stood out. Peter's glance rested upon them idly; they had halted before the notice-board, "The Strand," and were talking together. Then he staggered to his feet, uttering a cry, for he had seen Shaun!

At a swift pace he approached the two, who were staring. "Shaun!" he called in a low voice—and the man on whom his eyes were set stepped forward and cursed him with a stream of the foulest oaths and epithets. "Who do you take me for, you ——— fool?" he concluded savagely, scowling with a fixed and angry defiance.

Peter's certainty—he had not doubted—had vanished at the movement of the man, before ever he opened his lips. He had lost the illusion as quickly as it had come; the gesture was not the gesture of Shaun. He listened to the man's curses, wondering at his surly and distrustful vehemence and examining

what was certainly a strong resemblance. Features, height, and colouring were identical with Shaun's, but the eyes were smaller and closer together and were dull. Yes, the man's hair under his cap was sandy. "I mistook you for a friend of mine called Shaun James," said Peter, civilly.

"Come on, matey. We're in the wrong shop altogether," cried the other private, grinning but impatient, and he pulled at his comrade's arm. The latter's frown relaxed, and he said, with a more refined articulation than he had previously used, "Forgive my patois! No harm meant," turned on his heel and walked quickly away. The whole incident had occupied only a few seconds; it was not till Peter was almost back at his place that he remembered the evening of his first dinner-party, his meeting with Cynthia, and how Shaun had been arrested in mistake for a swell-mobsman. Then he stopped dead, but after reflecting an instant, sighed, sat down, and did his best to forget what had happened.

I should like some more socks, he wrote. *No cigarettes, thanks; we have heaps. I have been thinking about money. Shall we agree to keep ourselves poor, I mean, if ever we seem to be growing rich; and anyhow always to put aside money to give to people in memory of old Shaun? You know what I mean. Things are awfully real out here, and that has made me want to help people.*

At this point Peter was interrupted by the arrival of a corporal who was collecting a burying-party. Sleepers were aroused, spades and mattocks procured, and to Peter's surprise the corporal led the way over the parapet of the trench. "Here goes," he thought as he followed, "it's a new idea to charge the enemy with spades," and he had just time to wonder whether the non-com. had gone mad and to say to himself, "We shall be able to dig our own graves——" when his head rose above the sandbags. "Oh, it's a truce!" he exclaimed.

"What did yer think, young 'un?" asked the corpo-

ral. "Think we was goin' to commit sooicide? Not 'arf. Now, if you work 'ard we can talk to them chaps."

"Why didn't you tell us?" asked one of the privates who had been asleep. "Thought I was a ——— corpse."

"Tell you!" retorted the corporal. "You should keep your eyes and ears open on Christmas Day. We 'ad just such another kind o' stand-easy with Brother Boer fifteen years back, s'elp me! What were you doin' of, young 'un, not to notice what was goin' on?"

"I was writing to my wife," said Peter.

"Now dig away, you ———; order is to bury 'em where they lie. Lor', here's poor old Tom, all on top of a norficer by the look of him. He's 'ad his last caffy oly.* Give the Boshes their orficer, you two! Carry him careful over the barbed wire. He was the chap that was spyin'. Look at them dancing! Look at 'em! Like a lot of performin' animals. That's the piccolo we heard last night. Now get on with it!"

When the unpleasant task was over Peter was free to satisfy his curiosity in regard to the enemy. He was at once buttonholed by an argumentative person who desired to prove England's responsibility for the war. "You are an instructed man!" said the German. "I call to your reason, sir——"

"For goodness' sake, don't do that!" Peter interrupted. "I mean, let's talk about something else."

"I rejoice to meet a man of instruction!" said the Hun, drawing Peter's arm in his and leading him affectionately away. "With your officers I must not speak. What shall we speak over, then? I am Saxon, not Prussian. I hate the British politik which drags empty our homes, but not the British peoples. If you would but hear to reason this war would finish!"

Cheek his talking about reason, wrote Peter to Cynthia later in the day. *Wasn't it? Altogether he was a patronising sort of a chap. Still, I think he meant to be civil. He looked about forty, because of his stubby fair beard I suppose, but said he was twenty-seven and*

* Café au lait.

a doctor of philosophy at Leipzig. I was glad I had shaved and washed. He gave me cigars and I gave him Punch *and we walked up and down arm in arm while he held forth. I could not make him let go of my arm without being uncivil, so I had to grin and bear it. I asked him something about the Hymn of Hate and he recited it. He translated it line by line, but I did not think much of it. In German it is a spitting noise.*

Peter escaped and found his corporal distributing to the enemy copies of what he called "The Kayser's Last Will and Testament! Last Will and Testament of the Kayser!" "My girl sent me these," he explained. "They may as well have 'em." "Don't you start before I'm ready," he told the manufacturers of a football, which was something woolly stuffed with straw. "They say the Tsar's taken. D'you believe that?" he asked Peter.

"Not a bit. Can I play in goal? I'm lame."

"Where you like, sonny. Soccer rules. Goals are the two Jack Johnson 'oles. Take precious good care you don't fall——"

An officer with a tired face interrupted. "You must put up sticks for goalposts and play on a short field and for not more than a quarter of an hour. Then knock off and report to me. The game must be stopped at once if there's any rough play. Spectators must keep within their own barbed wire. These chaps won't understand the offside rule, so you'll have to cut that, and tell the men no charging! Keep the game friendly."

The corporal and Peter saluted. The officer moved away. "Our chaps is lucky," said the corporal, "as how the wire entanglements don't meet between the trenches. I got a good jar of preserved peaches off them Huns. Now then, boys! . . ."

Play began in the most energetic fashion, amid a chorus of guttural exclamations from the Saxons and our men's laughter and yells of advice to both sides. "Go it, Binjy," they howled at an enormous German with a very small blond head, who was lumbering towards Peter making deliberate and ferocious short

kicks at the ball. He had been left behind in the first sudden attack upon the German goal. "Hoch!" he yelled deep-throated, proceeding in his painstaking fashion; Peter had got the ball away, when the whole pack of English and Saxons arriving together, three or four of them having tripped in a long rut, hurled him and Binjy through the sticks amid cries of "Goal! Goal! Bravo, Binjy!"

"What d'jer call 'im Binjy for?" "Because it suits 'im. Buck up, you lazy swine!" "You won't never play for Chelsea!" rose from the English lines, while the Saxons applauded in a puzzled way. A solitary shell —it was the first of the morning—wailed overhead, and the corporal, rising to his feet, explained politely: "Sie habe ein Goal gewon, thanks to that ——— 'ole in the ground!"

Peter was not sorry when the game was over. He had again damaged his knee, when Binjy, who most likely weighed fifteen stone, had fallen on top of him. Accordingly, on resuming his letter in the afternoon he was led to take up once more the subject of rheumatism, and unconsciously repeated the simple statement he had made in the morning, *I am a bit lame owing to rheumatism in my knee.*

I am glad to say that when some of our chaps yelled out "Waiter!" the others shut them up, he wrote. *I suppose all will be quiet now until midnight. I would sooner not fight than fight, any day. Fighting is always beastly until one gets angry, and I'm inclined to think this will make it beastlier than it was before. It has made these chaps seem real somehow. They were frightfully eager to show us photographs of their wives and children, and our chaps lugged out pictures of their best girls. I heard a subaltern say it "wasn't decent," and that more or less expresses what I felt. And yet it was touching. God bless you, my darling. Take care of yourself and give my love to the parents.*

In the evening fires were lighted in the trenches, and Peter, who was on sentry duty, watched the flickering lights along the Saxon front continually mounting,

fighting against the darkness with darting swords of flame, and constantly dropping back defeated. From beyond came the sound of music, of *Die Wacht am Rhein* sung by a chorus of young voices wilfully deepened and hoarsened. Then a trumpeter blew nobly, so that the men in the trench behind Peter stopped their laughing and talking to listen. And when he had finished they broke out into *While Shepherds watched their flocks by night.* Peter and the other sentries joined in; he even thought an echo came from the Saxon line. . . .

The last long-drawn harmony died away, and silence descended upon a gentler darkness. As the voices and the laughter began again, Peter heard a man say: "I've 'ad many a copper for singin' that through, when I was a kid." A sergeant on his rounds came by, coughing, and the flare of the Christmas fires went up, and Peter peered into the night. He felt at that moment as though he could not shoot, could never kill his enemy again. Each twinkling flame was beauty, and the God of Love near.

Now a stentorian voice was hailing across the space between the two nations. "Engländer!" it bawled, "sing Tipperara, ef you pleese!" "What-o!" and "Hi!" went back the answering shouts; and from behind the nearest fire a steady voice called, "Pass the word down, sentries, *Tipperary!*" The Colonel moved forward into the light of the blaze. "You sing it, Martin," he said.

The tune was not yet old, and it had memories for Peter. His heart was like a proud-stepping charger: in the swing of the chorus he heard the tramp of the feet of his countrymen. He sang with blind eyes, possessed. Martin had a clear tenor voice, and the roar of the chorus answered him from right and left, from miles on either side, so that, long after he had ended, snatches of distant song were caught up again and died away. The enemy applauded politely, but Peter detected—or thought that he detected—hesitation in their clapping, and rejoiced. Exulting, he told himself they had aroused something they could not understand.

XXXVI

It was Christmas night, and Joyce had come into Cynthia's room at hair-brushing time for confidences. She was sitting in her pretty dressing-gown on a low stool by the fire, brushing away hard, while Cynthia, who had not begun to undress yet, sat in a big chintz-covered chair, quietly watching her.

"I'm sixteen now," said Joyce, who had guessed her thoughts. "I expect I do look frightfully changed!" She let her brush drop on the hearthrug and picked up the comb that was lying ready by her side.

"You look more grown-up——"

"—So do you, you darling!" interrupted Joyce. "I do believe you're lovelier than ever. I always did think you perfectly sweet in white! Those short, loose sleeves are absolutely top-hole!"

"I was going to say that, though you are taller, your face isn't changed. But it is! You've grown like the pictures of your mother, Joyce."

"I wish Mother would come home. Fancy Father getting stuck in Egypt! Isn't it horrid?"

"I wish Peter were there," sighed Cynthia, bending forward a little.

"Yes, of course. I wish Father could be there and here too. Cynthia, why were you so frightfully keen that Miss Taliesin should be asked to-day? I heard you talking about it to Aunt Emmie."

"Oh, Joycie, you weren't listening!"

"No, no. That's all I heard. I was passing the library when you two were coming out. Didn't you see me?"

"No."

"Well, I haven't changed into a long-eared sneak. Honestly, darling!"

"No, of course not. Joycie, your hair is just the right length. I wish mine were no longer."

"I say! Why, ever? I only wish mine came right below my waist, and waved naturally, and had those glorious golden lights in it!"

"Yours is quite pretty enough, dear, and you don't have such a bother with it. You've no idea what a plague mine is to do—Marie spoilt me. She used to do it in ways that looked very careless and simple, but they weren't! And her formal styles I find every bit as difficult. Besides, the brushing and the weight!"

"Let me brush it for you! Oh, Cynthia, do let me undress you!"

"No, Joycie dear, you're tired. Thank you, all the same."

"Do let me. I want to see your nice underneath things. May I? It's you who are tired, and I'll brush you frightfully carefully!"

"It's very sweet of you. Which dressing-gown has Marie put out? She will put out my things, although I don't let her do anything else for me. I'm learning to look after myself, and I don't want the kind woman to spoil me."

"Light-blue silk, with big embroidered birds. Will it be warm enough?"

"Yes, thanks, dear. If you'll undo the top lace at the back! There, that's it. Thank you. These ones do slip off easily. Now watch me put away my own evening dress. I'm proud of it!"

"You ought to have been at school longer," said Joyce wisely, her head on one side. "Then it would have come easier!"

"Rather! Now the dressing-gown. You are a dear, Joyce!"

"You'd better have shoes and stockings off. Here are your fur slippers. Didn't Aunt Emmie want Miss Taliesin, then, or couldn't she come?" Joyce was stooping at Cynthia's feet and had let her hair fall over

her face, and slipped out the question mumblingly.

Cynthia laughed. "Oh, Joycie! You aren't going to grow like That One?"

Joyce tossed back her hair. "I swear I'm not!" she said, anxiously. "I'm a beast! You're quite right to warn me."

"I didn't say you were, but it isn't really my secret to tell!" Lady Bremner had answered that Alan would never alter and that it was far better to drop the connection. "Will you try to forget what you heard?"

"Righto, I will. They are all saying 'Righto' at school, but a boy I met at a dance said it had quite gone out! He said girls' slang was always a year or two behind boys' slang. He was a thoughtful boy. Am I brushing you nicely?"

"Beautifully."

"We've been doing a lot of war-work at school and I believe knitting has made my hand lighter. I'll try at billiards to-morrow. Oh, That One! Her wedding was supposed to be quiet, but she told 'some people' when it was to be and a few thousands swarmed in. I think she might have asked us, but I suppose we were too pretty. Me, what? Well, I daresay some silly person will call me pretty, some day. May it be a long way off, for I should only laugh in his face. I heard she looked very pleased with herself and he, poor thing, with her! He was in his Yeomanry uniform, of course. I don't believe for a second they'll send him out to the front, he's so ancient. Why, she admits he's over forty!"

Joyce was brushing away steadily now at the long, fair tresses. "I hope she'll be happy," said Cynthia, thoughtfully. "I don't see why she shouldn't. Joyce, I'm going to tell you something. Did you notice that I went out by myself this afternoon?"

"I generally notice things," remarked Joyce. "It's a habit of mine."

"I went to see Peter's aunt, who's at the Windsor. She wrote and asked me to come, and as she was all alone I felt I ought to. Not that I was eager. I might have been, because she was really kind. I think she

was touched by Peter's going, and she wanted to know about Mr. James. You know there have been a lot of paragraphs in the newspapers about him. She asked whether the lawyers had 'presumed' his death yet, and if so whether he had left anything to Peter. It sounds horrid of her, but really she did it nicely enough not to hurt. I almost liked her, she was so kind and natural. She made her curiosity seem not impertinent at all. And it wasn't, for when she found out that we knew without lawyers that Shaun had left everything to Peter, she said, what do you think, Joyce? Why, that she admired Shaun so much that she had left him £200 a year in her will. There was to be nothing for Peter, and all the bulk of her money was to go to the National Service League and the Navy League. I was puzzled why she told me and surprised rather, and tried to comfort her. 'The newspapers assume the worst and so do the solicitors now, I'm told,' I said, 'but he may come back.' 'I liked what he did for your husband,' she went on. 'His selection of the Bath firm was very ingenious. He had an ingenious mind. I'm going to secure to Peter and you that £200 a year as soon as Mr. James's death is legally presumed and his will proved. You shall have it at once. I have always expected this war and made my investments accordingly, and I foresee that I am going to double my present income in spite of the taxes!' What do you think of that, Joyce? I haven't even told Mummy yet!''

''All right for you, darling! What a sportsman the old lady must be!''

''That's exactly the word, I think! I can't believe she's very much interested in us, really. She doesn't want Mummy to call on her or anything. She won't see me again.''

''You're jolly lucky, aren't you?''

''I don't see you can say that with Peter away,'' sighed Cynthia. ''But I know what you mean! I'm afraid of it, sometimes.''

''I'm perfectly blowed with thinking how lucky you are!'' exclaimed young Joyce, brush in air.

"Are the girls saying 'blowed,' dear? It's not very pretty!"

"You darling, you make the sweetest grandmother! Now leave your beautiful hair like that. It's done now, and let me take off your bracelets. I wish I could think I shall ever have arms like yours. They're perfectly ripping! Oh, I *love* those sapphires! Who gave them to you, Cyn?"

"Alan. Years ago. Joycie, you don't think I was heartless about Miss Middleton and . . . and Shaun, do you? I'm not."

"I must nurse this lovely smooth, white, firm arm. Come and be cuddled, sweet thing! Heartless? Rot, rot, rot! You know I'm not heartless about Mother. We *don't* talk about these things! That is what bothers me about That One. She always will. I can't think how you managed to pass so many exams. and play lacrosse and cricket well, when you look so lovely, you dear thing. By the way, I'm in the first cricket team this year, and I'm writing a novel. I do want Mother so! I hate growing up without a mother, and sixteen *is* growing up. Miss Bradby is frightfully nice; but then what *is* a headmistress? So's Aunt Emmie sweet, too. . . . Oh, I don't know. . . . You're the nicest, Mrs. Middleton. It was *darling* of you to ask me to stay with you at the flat!"

Joyce was now curled up at Cynthia's feet. Cynthia was leaning forward in an attitude of thought, one arm abandoned to her worshipper, the other, elbow on knee. She let herself sink back in the deep chair slowly, leaving Joyce a wrist still, and settled herself luxuriously. Thus the white mantelpiece came into view with its familiar photographs and flowers, and delicate blue china, and above it she looked into the round Venetian mirror. It was the room of her girlhood, little altered by time, for Lady Bremner had wished it to be always ready, and Cynthia had transferred only a few of her possessions to her married home. It was still a nest of flowered chintzes; the casement hangings were still gold; most of the pictures were the same. Another *Eve* hung

in the place of the old one, promoted. Her eyes filled with tears as she thought of Shaun.

"What is it like to be in love with a man?" asked Joyce, softly.

Cynthia looked troubled. "There's a kind of completeness about it," she answered vaguely. "It is more than oneself."

Joyce's sharp little face became wise. "I can just begin to imagine something of what it must be."

"It's like feeling oneself a part of somebody."

"Yes, but don't you hate that feeling at times, and want to be free? I think I should."

"I don't inside, ever. My heart and soul know I'm Peter's. At least, that's how I feel; I don't say everyone is like me."

Joyce laid her head against the girl's knee, stroking it gently with her cheek. "I do love you, Cynthia. Tell me what it is like to look forward to . . . you know what! Don't start so, dearest! Uncle Everard told me. He didn't mean to, but he did. Is it very, very, very heavenly?"

"It's . . . nice."

Joyce glanced up; Cynthia had shaken her great cloud of hair about her, and was blushing, and smiling a little.

"Ah," she said, "I can't guess a bit what that will be like! Do you like half-sleeves on dressing-gown and nightdress for me, Cyn?"

"Yes . . . yes, I do. I'm terribly frightened sometimes. I'm afraid but I won't be afraid, if you know what I mean, Joyce! I'm a coward about pain."

"Is there pain?"

"What, didn't you know? Often it's bad, but they can give you chloroform and things."

"I should hate pain!"

"Shaun used to say there's nothing worth having in the world that doesn't come with pain. He said everybody knew that."

"Did you ever care for Mr. James, Cynthia? . . .

I'm sorry, I oughtn't to have asked that. I don't *want* to be like Phyllis!"

"No, I didn't, but I was very, very fond of him. He taught me nearly everything I know. He was so kind. He never laughed at me."

"Why should he? You were always clever at school. He was decent to me, too, very decent. I howled when the news came. I was just one mass of tears like a kid."

Cynthia did not answer, and Joyce, rising to her knees, hugged her, saying, "You have a lot of sorrows and anxieties, after all, you darling thing! Talk to me about Peter. I want to hear *everything* about him."

Cynthia shook her head. "I can't. Not to-night. Peter's too much to me to be talked about."

"I hope you see that I'm wearing the brooch you and he gave me, even on my nightdress."

"I did."

"I can't wear Aunt Emmie's hat as well, or I would! I've had a glorious Christmas. Darling, I always pray for Peter. You don't think that cheek, do you? I mean well!"

Cynthia kissed her, impulsively and tenderly.

"I think I'm a little bit in love with him!" remarked Joyce, getting to her feet. "Since he went to the war—not enough to hurt. I believe he's making you a religious girl, Cynthia. I noticed you in church this morning. Is he?" Cynthia nodded. "He is an awfully good sort, and I don't think it will do you any harm. It has my approval!" She blew Cynthia a kiss and turned to the door. "Good-bye, dear. You must go to bed now. Good-night, little Cynthia!"

"Good-night, young Joyce!"

XXXVII

After that Christmas Peter suffered continually from rheumatism and for a time was constantly on the sick-list for periods of a few days, not because of the pain, which was slight, but by reason of lameness consequent on fluid developing in his weak knee. No doubt he would have been wise to have attempted to obtain long leave; indeed had he not been morbidly afraid of being taken for a malingerer he might have escaped much subsequent suffering. As it was, his knee grew worse and finally he came back to clerical work again, first under the Town Commandant of the place where his regiment was billeted, and then, being left behind when they went next into the trenches, he was transferred as clerk to the headquarters of a divisional staff. There Peter remained most unwillingly for several months, busied until all hours of the night with the kind of labour that he particularly disliked, and conscious that the state of his knee, which perforce remained bent under the table at which he wrote, was showing little or no improvement. When the weather was wet, which it usually was, the slightest over-fatigue made him as bad as ever, and when it was fine his progress was disappointingly slow. He seemed to be settling down into permanent lameness.

Then his knee recovered sufficiently to allow him to accompany a staff officer as orderly in an important mission which took them down the length of the French lines, and after that he returned to his regiment, where he found chiefly strangers. Peter, however, did not stay long with the regiment. The first time he got thoroughly soaked through his rheumatism returned with considerably increased severity. He spent two days racked with pain and then was sent back to hospital; after three

weeks there he found himself again at headquarters, limping to and from duty on a couple of sticks.

"*Are* you fit for duty?" the General wanted to know, the first time he noticed him.

"Only for this, I'm afraid, sir," answered Peter, flushing.

"There's no 'only' about it, my lad. I asked for you; they tell me you are the best clerk we've had. Sit down and get on with your work." Peter knew that he ought to be grateful for a place of comparative safety and the chance to keep dry, but he could not succeed in feeling it. The impression was strong in his mind that he ought to rejoin the regiment. He thought that he did not wish to go, and so he wanted to be made to; these people seemed to be robbing him of his self-respect.

Though Peter had not time to meditate about his development he was conscious in a dim kind of a way that he was growing up. War had acquired a meaning for him. It had interest from its effect upon oneself. It was no longer a mere matter of noise and fatigue and stenches and horrors and incessant preoccupation with details and of unexpectedly finding oneself alive and very tired. It was something which simplified one and built one up; when it did not knock one down. Like poverty and most other evils it seemed capable of being spiritually constructive in certain cases. Peter supposed vaguely that this was what it was for. He saw a good coming to England from all this carnage, an improved comprehension of life on the part of those who should survive. Was it worth it? If God thought it was, and evidently He did, that was enough for Peter Middleton.

And then he went on a second journey with the staff officer, sticking to his work in spite of increasing and terrible pain, and was left behind in a French hospital with rheumatic fever; during the recovery from which he had much space for reflection and many things became clear. Some of them had before been subconsciously apprehended, for they rose in his mind side by side with some vivid memory of war. "I don't recollect thinking of anything when that happened!" he

would say to himself, "yet I suppose I must have done," for the image persisted. Other conclusions he arrived at as a result of hard and sustained thinking, of which in his weak state he found himself unexpectedly capable. Indeed the motionlessness induced a dreamy clarity of mind in which a train of thought passed before him with the orderliness of an arranged procession. He had the power to arrange, and to keep his richly laden thoughts moving in steady progress across the stage of his mind while he sat apart in a dark place and watched the shining pageant. And this was not feverishness, but the opposite of it; it was manhood attained, the first consciousness of intellectual maturity. Shaun had said that there would come a time when he would be satisfied about them, would lose interest, when their development could at last be safely predicted. Peter felt that that time had come now, knew it in a modest, firm way different from the certainty with which he had thought before the war that his development was already over. Therefore he did not now fear death. What had come to him indeed was the knowledge of his own faith, the simple faith of his fathers. And he was no longer afraid of the effect of his death upon Cynthia. There was a time when his sudden going might have embittered and spoiled her, but he *knew*, although she had never said it, that that time was now gone; through daily facing the possibility of the agony she had grown strong enough to conquer it, should it come. Though he was no longer afraid of death, love of life was very powerful in him, and he prayed for both their sakes that death might pass him by.

There was a picture very clear before Peter, of a distant, lurid sky, blood-red, strangling the moon, above a horizon of white flashes; while below the spectator, at the foot of a hill lit by the ghastly glare, was a huge gasometer on the opposite side of a pink and curving river. On the left, round the side of the hill, clustered the lights of the ancient city upon whose defences the shells were yelling and shrieking and bursting into those fierce, white-hot explosions. Inhabitants of the place

formed little groups of shadow upon the hill, around Peter, above and below: sometimes they moaned, as a shell shot clear with a tail like a rocket and for an instant, bursting, appeared before their dazzled eyes as a mace crushing the dear land of France; sometimes a dog howled pitifully in the intervals of the ponderous and stunning uproar, which drifting from the horizon on the wings of a cold wind made the earth resound and appeared to account for the shivering of the stars. This picture was connected in Peter's mind with something too insignificant to have been present consciously when he beheld it. He associated it with his own condemnation of his secret marriage. The lights in the indigo sky had told him that he had done wrong: and perhaps the strepitant clamour had confused him so that he could remember now nothing but a disorder of thought which gradually resolved itself under the cool influence of grey hospital walls. He would not blame Shaun. That was right, and he was young enough still not to be willing to accuse himself; however he did so honestly, perceiving as his best excuse the effect of the Great Company's service upon his character; an effect which from a greater distance and viewed in perspective still stood out as wholly damnable. That Cynthia had consented was a proof of the pervasive influence of Shaun. How Shaun had loved subtlety, and with what a genius nevertheless had he retained his grip upon simplicity!

That tender, bright intelligence was gone from the world; and Peter was not clever enough to estimate with what singular delicacy his fate and Cynthia's had been weighed in the balance before Shaun had decided to help them. He never realised, what Shaun had foreseen, that in escaping extreme poverty they had not only avoided a great danger but also been deprived of one of the great widening and deepening influences of life. The war had replaced it, and Peter did not perceive the omission. Shaun had assumed the part of a god, weighing good against good and evil against evil. He had played with their lives as a skilful card-player finesses, taking every risk, including that greatest of

all, the blame of dead Doris, who had always trod in straightforward ways and walked with him now the paths of asphodel. . . . Once in his delirium Peter glimpsed her vanishing with Shaun along a yellow mead. They fled with unearthly swiftness hand in hand towards the places of the Blest, and the golden mead lay empty behind them and shone in glorious sunshine.

. . . . . .

And there were waking pictures in Peter's mind of places and battle scenes in which had grown his knowledge of his love of Cynthia. One was strange, the approach to a railway bridge in a French town up a wet and deserted street. Sentries paced overhead, and a spider's web of wire filled the arch, outlined against the sky beyond. Somehow she had seemed close, then; and she had done so through the bitter fight for a village that looked not worth the conflict as the flames blew high from its ruined houses. The regiment had had the end of it and the spiked helmets had given back. Peter had emerged unwounded from the carnage with a mouth that was furry and tasted of copper. He thought that he had turned into a mechanism that fired and thrust. Surely his arm and head and shoulders had become a part of his rifle! It seemed as though he were spitting bullets from his mouth; so furious and unremitting had his attention been to the business of slaughter, while all the time Cynthia had been very close.

He remembered a swift river flowing through a winding, tree-clad valley. A procession of tall pines marched with the road along the further bank to a farmhouse, bright under the first sun of spring; before whose walls the river widened and shallowed into a ford. Up high the sky was blue above the gently waving tree-tops, and the water rippled with a pleasant sound of eagerness and briskness over the pebbles, and that was the only thing audible save the rustle and soft murmur of the forest. Peter had forgotten the car in which he sat, forgotten his officer poring over the map with the chauffeur, forgotten the grizzled French sergeant at his side. By an illusion of the imagination Cynthia was

standing near, enjoying and loving the beauty with him. Tall, gracious Cynthia! She had tossed her chin, he knew, although she was slightly behind him, and with half-closed eyes and happy, smiling lips was sniffing the forest scents. Her hands were hanging clenched. She was hatless and the sunlight was playing with her hair. . . . And then a jingling and dull clattering had sounded from behind the farmhouse. The French sergeant had leaned forward and placed a hand on Peter's knee, as the head of a column of hussars emerged from the road round the great barn, and trotted easily towards the ford. As they approached a trumpeter blew an echoing call, and they spread out fanwise till right along the stream the men were watering their horses, which stood knee-deep with extended necks. The sergeant removed his hand. *"C'est beau maintenant!"* he said, in a tone of satisfaction.

But the picture that Peter loved most, his Vision Splendid, had come on a misty day in Champagne when he looked down on a line of marching troops slanting through vineyards under telegraph wires half a mile away across the slope of a hill. They were scarcely visible in the swirls of mist and rain, they dragged like tired men, and the little, distant town from which they were heading was of the barest ugliness. And yet, while his eyes were straining to make out a factory chimney, there Peter had known suddenly that Cynthia was given him by God to watch over; for the first time in his life he had been conscious of himself as a part of a divine purpose that he could understand. He thrilled and shook with the greatness of the revelation: no thought of its simplicity was with him. He held the Key of the World, new and shining and golden. He panted, catching his breath at the ineffable strangeness of the knowledge that God is Love. Because of the love of the spirit which he had for her, he could never lose her, for that was of God. And heaven would be all love; and on earth, how crystal clear it was! 'Little children, love one another!' That was the law and the gospels. It was Beauty, more than that it was Truth!

Those three were a trinity in unity, and the greatest of the three was Love. And the mist whirled grey before Peter's eyes, and his knapsack weighed like lead upon his back and pain racked his knee; while he lay still and quiet now the memory of these things returned, following upon the memory of the glory, even as the mist had closed in upon the landscape. But if the glory was dimmed, the knowledge of it remained. Faith was brave in him like a banner.

. . . . .

It was to Shaun James that he owed Cynthia, under God. It was to him that he owed everything! Dear old Shaun! His heart yearned for the friend whom he could not realise he had outgrown. He thought of him very humbly, as a boy does of his father. And again Peter meditated that last letter, in which he had said they were the Future of England. He puzzled over it. Could Shaun have been thinking of the child? He must have meant more than that. He had not even known that there would be a child, a thing still scarcely credible by Peter himself, who had a swift vision of Cynthia wrapped about in a silver veil, a thing very holy, to be worshipped on the knees of the spirit.

The Future of England! With whom did it rest? Would it lie in the hands of a class of truer gentlemen, made comradely by battle? did it depend upon a deeper and kinder comprehension of man by master and master by man? Or was Shaun thinking of marriages of love? Perhaps he meant that the future lay with modest, simple people generally, for Peter had heard him apply those two adjectives to Cynthia and himself. Modest? Yes, Peter supposed he was modest, since he could not see that he possessed any virtues in particular—which he must do or Cynthia would not have cared for him; and he had been told by lots of people that he was simple, some of whom, like Shaun, had intended it for a compliment. "A mixture of simplicity and meaning business is usually attractive," had said The Master, "I wish to heaven I could speak the English language properly! No, you need not be surprised that you make

friends wherever you go." Yet Peter had continued to be surprised; he thought now with gratitude of the wonderful manner in which people had gone out of their way to be decent to him. His old sergeant, for example, the General and his staff, many peasants, a few townsmen here and there, on whom he had been billeted, surgeons, nurses . . . heaps of people! One nurse had said that he wasn't a bit like an artist, which was a puzzle to Peter, who felt more of an artist than ever and was confident of doing better work—if he ever got back. He must do better, because his backbone had stiffened. He was conscious of inherited firmness of character. His father was strong in him. He had wondered how, although he had lived in dreams out of wartime, in wartime the grim necessity of holding himself in had left him cool. That was his father's, too. He wondered whether feeling one's ancestral virtues coming is always a sign of having passed the stormy period of youth; for he knew that he had left it behind. What had he got from War? His manhood, religion, power to sacrifice self to a greater extent and with more simplicity. Well then, was that what England was getting? Did Shaun mean that? Peter continued puzzled, as still much of the parable was hid from him. Shaun had meant most of those things, and yet more; for the simple gentleman who is lover and artist as well had seemed to him the greatest thing upon earth, and in the creative artist without a volatile temperament he had recognised the salt of it. Peter was over-modest to understand wholly; in his inmost thoughts he attached less importance to his art than Shaun did. He put his artist side last, while Shaun had foreseen Peter the practical man and leader of men by reason of his perception of Beauty.

XXXVIII

"Let us then not commit follies! Is it that you wish of your own heart to go back to these trenches? Is your preference personal, my brave boy?" inquired the head of the French hospital.

"No, my Colonel," replied Peter, honestly.

"You have common sense, it appears! Sœur Béatrice tells me that all love the Englishman; perhaps she includes herself in the 'all,' who knows? And I have enjoyed our conversations. Your accent is truly Parisian, my friend, although there lacks something in the grammar. A little something, is it not so? You are married?"

"Yes, my Colonel."

"Children?"

"Not yet, my Colonel."

"But soon, perhaps?"

"Yes, my Colonel."

"Ah! It is in my mind, then, to do you a good turn. You shall go to England and you shall take from me a letter to your War Office. You had heard my name before you came here?"

Peter had not, but he knew now that the name was famous: "Yes, my Colonel."

"Good, my boy! You lied with courtesy, and I thank you. It is my vanity to be celebrated. You will find that my letter will carry you to England. When you get there you must take care of yourself, for you are not beyond a cure. You need rest, you need baths, you need more rest, you must pay attention to the heart. But if you commit follies you will be lame throughout your life, which also may be short. *Bon voyage!*"

Peter left the same afternoon and arrived at Paris in

the evening, utterly exhausted; he was too fatigued to write to Cynthia. And next morning he overslept himself and only caught his train at the Gare du Nord because it was an hour late in starting. In the midst of a chorus of cheers it drew back to the platform to receive him. He was tall, pale, in khaki, and walked with a stick, which was sufficient to arouse the voluble sympathies of the French crowd; he longed to call out to them how he was no hero, only an unfortunate victim of rheumatism; but that would have been ungracious, more especially to the officials who had waved back the express, so he was forced to put up with his ovation and relieve himself by explaining to the occupants of the carriage. They, however, murmured to each other sentiments about the modesty of true valour until his cheeks burned and tears of humiliation filled his eyes, and then, ceasing to make the effort to respond to their kindness, he lay back in the corner they had given him and pretended to sleep.

The train rattled and jogged out of the Paris suburbs into green country. Buds were bursting in the hedges and the blue sky spoke of peace; but Peter was racking his brains to remember when he had last written to Cynthia. The information perpetually evaded his memory, slipping round a corner of his mind at the moment when he appeared certain to secure it. Had he said that he hoped to come home? As a matter of fact he had scarcely ventured to hope, but the impression was strong in him that he had said it nevertheless; if so, a telegram would be all that was needed to prepare her. She certainly must not come to meet him, as it could not be very long before that took place which was too wonderful for him to think of. Also he could not tell precisely what was going to happen to him, until he had been before a Medical Board in London. They might send him to Harrogate or to Droitwich; the French doctor had mentioned Droitwich. He might even be turned back at Dieppe and sent to some spa in France. It would be better not to telegraph till he reached England.

When had he last heard from Cynthia? That was a

still more difficult question to answer, for delirium stood between. It was before he had gone to hospital; it must have been five weeks ago! But then, there had come a card from Lady Bremner, during the time that he was laid up, saying that she was all right. He remembered reading, *Cynthia is well. Do not be anxious about her.* He supposed that this card must have been forwarded from headquarters, and why had no more letters come through? He had worried about that before, but there was some answer to it. Headquarters must have forgotten him; after all it was understandable, since he had been in a French hospital, a couple of hundred miles away from the British lines. One occasionally missed letters when one was in an English hospital. Surely, though——! yes, of course! He had written as soon as he was able to hold a pen; evidently he must have omitted his address. He was too tired to remember what he had done or had not done.

He must have slept, for it seemed that only five minutes had passed when Rouen darted in and out of his vision amid the roar of tunnels. "That place is like Chatham grown beautiful," he said to himself, and then began to worry about the letters again. It was pleasant to feel that there was no reason why he should not worry, that in front lay rest for a time. Indeed the right to plague himself by idle speculation appeared in the guise of a luxury; it helped him to realise that he was free, that the stress and strain of active service lay behind him, being left farther in the rear each moment by the rattling train. Presently the train stopped, and he glanced idly out and saw green grass growing in a side track, and then an express rushed by. He had always destroyed her letters as soon as read: was that wise? Better than their being found by strangers, perhaps by Germans. He had been a bad correspondent. Cynthia had encouraged him to be, by her understanding of the difficulties that stood in his way. She had spoilt him. She had appeared always—nearly always—serene and confident: now that he was returning to her he wondered how much of this had been pretence. He blamed himself.

In Dieppe there were formalities to be gone through that wasted the greater portion of the day. When Peter at length obtained his pass he was ordered to cross in a hospital ship which was leaving at dawn. This meant more long hours of darkness in France, another wearisome night before he could attain to home and rest. He had been approaching these in imagination and suddenly they had departed to a very far distance; the slight disappointment of this delay was the hardest thing which he had yet had to endure. It overpowered him and he spent the evening in a state of wretchedness utterly disproportionate to the occasion, his impatience growing with every minute that passed until he made himself feverish, while the discovery that he was short of money did not conduce to calm him. He had received no pay since being in hospital and would have been left without a 'sou' for the journey, had not Sœur Béatrice insisted on being his banker.

Peter was in luck. His finances were now repaired by a medical officer, a stout brisk little Surgeon-captain, called Gwiney, who by chance overheard his name and immediately claimed acquaintanceship; it transpired that he was a friend of the Bremners, an immense admirer of Cynthia. Peter dimly remembered meeting his wife at a dinner-party in Portman Square, and again one day when he had been out with Cynthia, but of the little man himself he retained no recollection, which mattered not the least since Gwiney did the remembering for two, proved the soul of good-nature, and was able to obtain for him an advance on account of back pay. At last Peter got to bed, though not to sleep. He turned and tossed until it was time to rise and go on board.

With the morning light, Cynthia seemed closer and his need of her greater still. He fairly ached for her arms and the pillow of her breast; he was very weary, and he could see her eyes above him, looking down into his. As the coast of France faded from his sight in a drizzle of mist, before he went below, for the first time he felt anxious about her silence, which struck him as

strange and ominous. The explanations which had satisfied him hitherto appeared terribly insufficient. He began to tremble. He became possessed by a nerve-racking alarm. He shivered and shook, and had hardly strength enough to put one foot in front of the other.

This condition of collapse, due in part to fatigue and weakness, partly to his apprehensions on her behalf, lasted throughout the voyage. Over and over again he tried to calculate when his child should be born. Over and over again he was baffled, because Cynthia had been intentionally vague, not wishing him to be uneasy about her when the time came. She had mentioned something about June, he recalled. But he could not forget that she was young and inexperienced, perhaps careless. She might be wrong. It might be the end of May, and the middle of the month was already past. The horrible idea assailed him that his agony resulted from an intuitive sympathy with hers. The picture of her, dying, with white face and clammy brow and pitiful, distorted smile, sprang into his brain and stayed there. He could see the pillow and her long hair streaming above it, and the agitation of her hair caused by her tossing head, and the rail of the bed behind; it was bright brass against pale-blue hangings. . . . By a tremendous effort he dismissed the picture from his mind, and it revived when he went up on deck again, and danced between him and the tossing waves and the black outline of a destroyer on the rim of a sodden sky; until pelt, down came the rain, and a vexed nurse caught sight of him and drove him below. There, after a while, he found work to do.

But the vision returned in the train as he was speeding smoothly towards London. The bustle of landing, the activity necessary to procure a speedy departure, the concentration of will required to deal with officials and the relief of dispatching telegrams, had banished it; now he sat listening to the kind-hearted chatter of busybodies, and *saw*. When they left him alone he lay back with closed eyes and saw more vividly. He staggered in to the dining-car to lunch, and the vision was above his plate; he stared out of the window, and her hair

streamed with the hurrying hills. Yet his wits had not failed him through the formalities on the quay and at the station; which he was glad to remember, as it made him the more confident of the discretion of his telegrams. No, they could not do her harm! In the one to the flat he had said, *Back safe Must go War Office first Wire care P.O. Charing Cross you are well,* and to Lady Bremner he had telegraphed, *Back safe Tell Cynthia Arrive home to-night.* As he read them in memory the vision formed itself out of the words.

He presented the French doctor's letters in Whitehall. A stern-faced, white-haired man received him with solemn kindness and gave curt but detailed instruction with regard to baths and cures. Peter listened with amazement, as he seemed to contemplate giving indefinitely extended leave. Peter had hoped for a couple of months, but—

"There will be no difficulty about your discharge," said the surgeon.

"My discharge!" gasped Peter.

"Your discharge!" repeated the other sharply. "To retain you in the Service would be to ruin your health without benefit to the country. You will appear before a Medical Board to-morrow at eleven."

"Very good, sir!" said Peter.

"You will be able to find other ways of being useful. Your rheumatism will respond to some such treatment as I have indicated. I am afraid that the trouble in the knee will be liable to recur; even with the greatest care you are likely to be not immune from periods of slight lameness. However I gather from this letter"—he glanced at the paper in his hand—"that you are an artist by profession, so that will scarcely matter to you as much as it might to others. When painting out of doors you will do well always to be on your guard against damp. However, your medical attendant will advise you further on these points, so I will bid you good afternoon." He rose as he spoke. "To-morrow at eleven, Private Middleton. In the room below."

Peter was dismissed, and wandered out into the open

air with his thoughts in a whirl. Somehow it never had occurred to him that he might be given his discharge. He could not deny his relief. He did not attempt to deny it; he was conscious of a passion of rejoicing. Yet he knew he would have tried to get back, he knew he would have made the best of his case to the Medical Board, and he was thankful to the man who had put this out of his power with the most gracious and skilful tact.

He found himself gazing into the window of the A.B.C. which presents a narrow front to the pavement at the top of Whitehall. Charing Cross Post Office was close, but the hour was half past five and he had not eaten since noon. In his exhausted state he dared not go there to face either joy or sorrow. He felt that he could not, unless the noise of the traffic were to cease and the people to move out of the streets and leave him a solitude in which he might approach. After a cup of tea he grew stronger, though not strong enough to bear the awful shock with which he heard that there was nothing for him. It seemed to spin him round, like a blow on the side of the head. But the clerk's unconcerned face showed that he had not moved. "Thank you," said Peter, hurrying out of the building. He hailed a taxi and drove, with beating heart, to the flat.

A little consideration should have told him that Cynthia was probably with her mother, and when in Pall Mall this did occur to him he immediately concluded that his telegram would have been repeated to Portman Square. It was small relief, therefore, to find the flat closed; and all his fears were redoubled by the statement of the girl in the shop below that the lady had gone away ill some weeks before. He stammered out, "Was it—was it a birth? Wh-where did she go to?" The girl who was a stranger to Peter stared, offended. "I don't know nothin' about it," she declared primly, turning away. "The servants 'ave gone now, and the place is closed. That's all I know!" The obvious thing was to go on to Portman Square. As the taxi swayed and leaped, Peter wondered whether he

would ever believe in God again, if that had happened which might have happened. He listened to himself asking the question in a voice that was like his and was not his, yet knew that he uttered no word aloud. Something said to him that she *was* dead; then his faith swung clear and true like the beat of a pendulum. "God is! God is!" "Then she's not dead," he said internally; "she's alive!" "But she may be alive, being dead," he rapidly added; this time he groaned aloud and felt himself growing cold and numb. He shuddered, and "Perhaps she's near me now!" he thought, looking eagerly about. He sank against the cushions and closed his eyes.

Portman Square. The flight of steps. The familiar door. The familiar bell. The familiar short moment of waiting; and then the opening of the big, green door. "Is Lady Bremner in?" he asked the maid, his courage failing him at the last moment.

"She's out, sir!" answered the maid, who recognised him, and she looked a trifle surprised. "Mrs. Middleton is in the garden," she continued in a natural tone. "Will you go through, sir?"

He dropped his purse in the attempt to give it to her while hurrying by, and called to her to pay the man. He knew only that something was coming for which he had long waited. Change was in the air. Had not a change happened? Was she not safe? And then he was upon the verandah steps, looking at a girl sitting, with her back turned, under a tree at the end of the garden. An apple-tree glowing with blossom. Her hair was uncovered and showed fair with soft tendrils curling; and the descending sun shone full upon her, reddening the burnished hue of her hair, deepening the pink of the blaze of colour above her, bathing the picture in a tender mist of powdered gold so that it took a magic beauty of quiet and peace. And she was stooping gently over some burden.

He walked across a lawn pied with daisies and he hardly knew how he moved. It seemed that he stole through the air as in a dream, yet he noticed that the

borders were ragged with something of a country wildness, and the peach-tree on the wall was untrimmed, and the flowers in the parterres grew rank and thick. And he knew that this girl was Cynthia his wife, but the knowledge meant nothing to him. There was a strangeness about her that he could not fathom. The details of her attire were more vivid than herself. She was a white-skinned beauty in a pink-embroidered summer gown, and the skirt of it was striped with pink. The collar of the bodice was folded back and the bodice itself was white and shaped like a jumper, resting upon the outside of her skirt. He saw the shadows that he would draw to show where it clung to the girl's slender waist. And then suddenly she rose and turned and faced the sunlight and gazed at him. First he saw the white lovely column of her throat and below it the pointed opening of her blouse, beneath which was a black velvet flower that was like a caress on the fairness of her skin. He did not look at her face, although he was aware of deep and starry eyes, all startled, and overjoyed lips just parting, for there in her arms was a living babe, upreaching with rosy crumpled hands. The baby cooed and Peter stared, while the sunlight leaping above the mother's head left its splendour in her face. The sun had hidden himself below the roof-tops; for a moment the pink glory of blossom shone in his last rays, which then mounted heavenward. But the garden remained full of warmth.

Ah! . . . Ah! . . . It was coming: joy rose in him like a cry. Cynthia! She was stepping towards him with a little rush. During an infinitesimal instant the beautiful girl was there as Cynthia, both the identities existing in his consciousness side by side. Then she was gone and Cynthia alone was left. He was holding her, calling her Dear and Starry and Sweet and His Wife. She had a hand on his shoulder, stroking him, her other arm encircled the infant. "He's yours!" she babbled, and laughed and cried with happiness. "Oh, my Peter come back again! Didn't you know? Hadn't you heard? Peter, Peter, I love you so!"

"Ours!" cried Peter. He snatched at the bundle. She resigned it to him fearlessly.

"Don't crush him!" she said. "He's very, very little yet."

Peter stared down at the tiny, still face with the closed eyelids, which opened slowly and gave him a glance of heavenly blue, and then drooped again. "I understand this!" he said, in a tone of surprise. "I don't need to be taught how to be a father. And how different it is! . . . But Darling, why didn't I hear? When was he born?"

"Three weeks ago, on the second of May. Mummy wrote letters, and postcards."

"I got one! After. But it was addressed to the regiment or to headquarters—wasn't it?"

"You did not give the hospital address until your last letter, Peter."

"I never got any letters after that!"

"We wrote."

"Then they never fetched up! I've been scared, but that's all done. Cynthia, I'm home for good. I've got my discharge!"

"Peter!" The cry told him how she had suffered, revealed depths.

"Yes," he said. "For good."

"Peter, what a day! How lovely it all is."

"Take him, Starriest. I want to sit down. I'm tired. Can't you lay him down? I want to hold you."

"He must go in," declared Cynthia. Her pretty tone of responsibility sounded familiar: it was one of the inflections of her voice that he loved most. Side by side, the young father and mother walked slowly into the house, where all was quiet; Lady Bremner had not yet returned. Cynthia rang, and gave the baby to a nurse. Then she passed on with Peter into the library, into a pearly dusk and glimmer of diffused reflections. She drew a curtain, and looked at the east flushed with rosy light. She spoke in a soft voice.

"That's the promise of a new dawn for England after the darkness which is to come."

Then she came to Peter and held his hands, asking many things about himself, the little personal questions inspired by tender curiosity, which are so sweet to recollect in after-years. His health, his journey, whether he would take something to eat, his clothes; commonplace topics that add depth and poignancy to the remembrance of such a moment, of its exchange of looks of love and understanding and thankfulness, of its joy that would otherwise be over-great to be apprehended. Similar trifles had been a torture to Shaun James. Cynthia thought of Shaun, and they were sad. They clasped each other's hands, tight, tight. Their eyes implored each other never to go away and leave one of them desolate. In that interchange they passed into each other's souls, and recognised there submission to the will of God. And both became conscious of fresh power.

"I never told you!" said Cynthia impulsively. "I never answered you when you asked me about money, whether we should live up to our income, in that letter which you wrote at Christmas, Peter. I wouldn't until I'd tested myself. And truly I'm not as extravagant and selfish as I was. I *can* promise now! I always felt that it was better to stay poor and help people, and it's in me now to do it, thanks to you and Shaun."

He would have protested, had he not known that she was really thanking God.

. . . . . .

Later, as she was moving in the dusk to the switch, he tried to tell her, "I've not been much use to my country——" but she interrupted him, crying, "That's not true, my Peter!" She flooded the room with light, and stood for a moment there motionless, beautiful and kind. "England needs us all," she comforted.

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